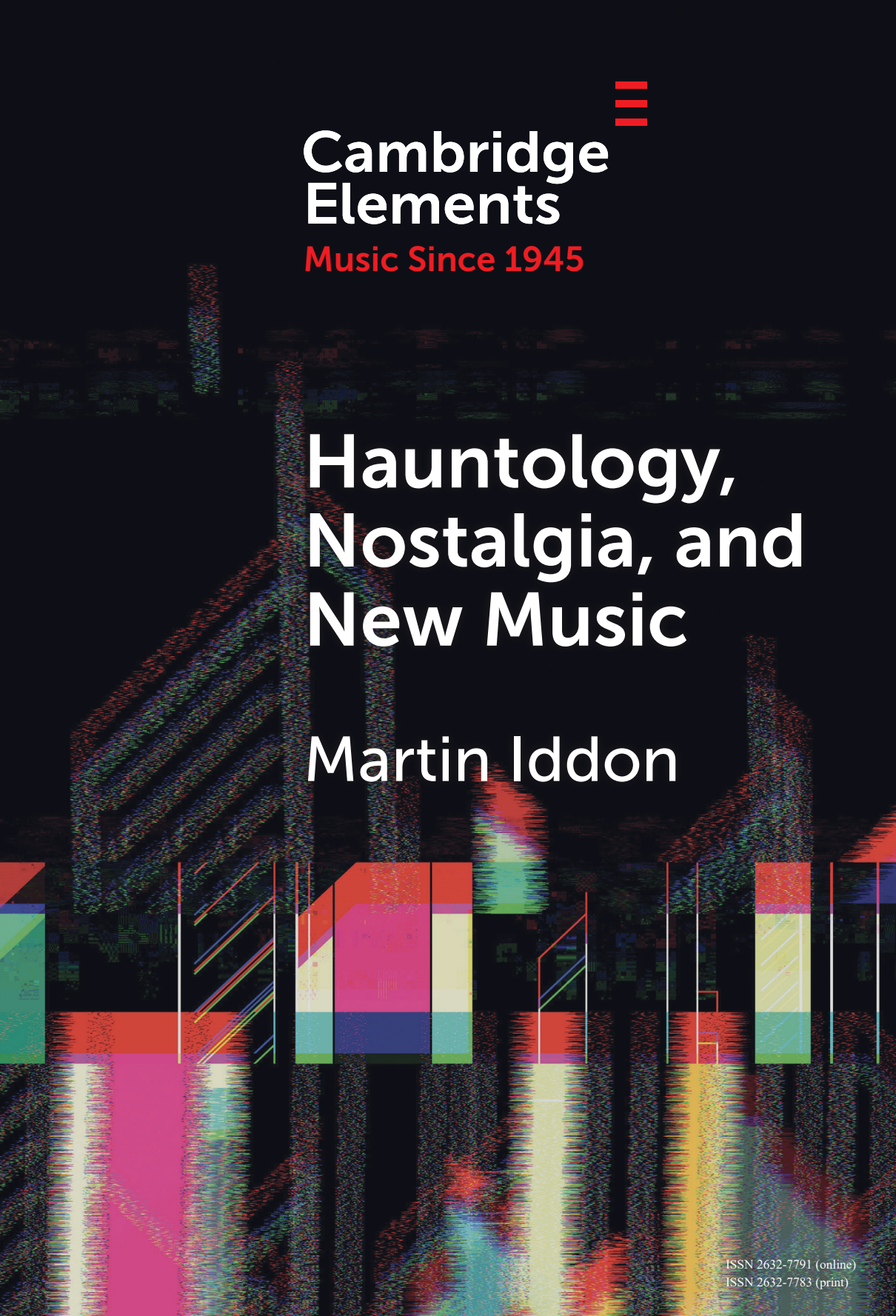

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HAUNTOLOGY, NOSTALGIA, AND NEW MUSIC

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Hauntology, Nostalgia, and New Music

Elements in Music Since 1945

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Abstract: In the past quarter of a century, or longer, popular cultures and musics both popular and 'new' have become concerned, rather than with futurity, with their own pasts, in a world where, after Fukuyama's 'end of history' or Berardi's 'cancellation of the future', the idea of fundamental historical change has seemed increasingly incredible. This Element is a critical study of music in what Fisher calls 'nostalgia mode', a flattened, high-gloss reproduction of a music indistinguishable from that which already exists, save for its technical perfection, and of hauntological musics critical of this stance, which deploy the music of the past not in reassuring fashion, but to stress that, in 'unwounded' history, they would not still be here. Although normally treated separately, this paradigm applies not only to popular music but also to new music, which has historically claimed the music of the future as its privileged territory.

Keywords: nostalgia, hauntology, new music, popular music, Mark Fisher

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Preface

This short text draws together musics which are, very often, treated as if they have little, perhaps can have little, to do with one another: popular music and new music. This separation represents a continuing and ongoing re-inscription, at least on the side of self-styled 'serious' new music, of the sorts of suspicions that, say, Theodor W. Adorno had of musics which were close – any proximity was too close – to the world of the commercial production of music or of the stark distinction once felt in Germany, through most of the second half of the last century arguably the very centre of the world of new music, between *U-Musik* and *E-Musik*, which is to say between music listened to for mere sensuous pleasure and 'serious' music, which had more weighty truths to tell. Though I find it difficult to imagine that there are many who would still find that division particularly compelling, few, too, who I think would be prepared to insist that popular music isn't perfectly capable of being art, with as capital an A as might be desired, even while being pleasurable in simple terms to listen to, it seems to me that it remains at least unusual to treat the two approaches in tandem, as if they have anything particularly profound to do with one another.

In that sense, what follows is perhaps a sort of experiment, but one based on my underlying claim that, in the period between the late 1970s and the 2010s, both popular music and new music took similar paths in terms of their senses of self and their relationship to their respective histories. These have to do, above all, with broader societal understandings that the period saw the run-up to and triumph of what, on one side of the political divide, was conceived of as the End of History and, on the other, as the cancellation of the future. This idea, in either formulation, suggests that a point had been reached where 'progress', either as a matter of fact or as a credo in futurity, as it had hitherto been conceived, was becoming impossible, the latter an idea, aesthetically speaking at least, held in common by new and popular musics alike. The text, then, in a way, tries to tell the same story from both perspectives – at the risk of, in the sense that so much of this story takes place after 'the end' of history, *Godot*-like, nothing happening, twice – to attempt to show both the ways in which these two musical approaches became concerned not with what they would do next, but with what they had already done, what that mode of thinking has to do with nostalgia, and how the idea of hauntology might offer some way of harnessing these nostalgic impulses to imagine that there still could be futures which are different from the present, which are worth striving towards. Plausibly, the text could have been organised the other way around: I begin with the popular before moving to the world of new music. But it seems likely to me that this organisation begins with music, film, culture, and thinking probably more familiar to most readers,

which will help the second half of text speak more easily. Not only that, but I also want to end, if I can, on a note of optimism for new music: since I have a personal stake in it, it is here, above all, that I want to suggest there may, still, be ways of thinking about how to come back to progressive ideas of musical utopia, not as a lost Eden but as a future promise, if one that still needs fighting for.

I am grateful to Kate Brett and to Mervyn Cooke for their support and enthusiasm for this project, as well as to the peer reviewers for their helpful and encouraging comments.

Introduction

> When a rocket ship explodes and everybody still wants to fly
>
> —'Sign o' the Times', Prince

At some point in the mid to late 1980s, something rather strange was taking place in Anglophone popular music: the rise of nostalgic popular music. By this I don't mean popular music which expresses ideas of nostalgia: there's plenty of earlier popular music that evokes in some fairly general sense a longing for the recent (or more distant) past, as in the Beatles' 'When I'm Sixty-Four' (1967), which gestures, too, towards music hall.[1] This, though, I think is music which is *about* the idea of nostalgia and, too, points towards nostalgia for the past as some *future event*: Paul McCartney himself would only turn sixty-four in 2006. What seems to me to arise between about 1986 and 1991 is music which *is* nostalgic – where the affective surface of the music evokes a lost past – and which insists upon that nostalgia as a *present condition*. That sense that, in 1967, nostalgia is going to dominate the future turns out, I think, to be prescient; the year the Beatles are *looking forward from* towards a nostalgic future seems prophetic too, since the nostalgia too tends towards a period between about 1962 and 1968.

In 1986, two films were released, within just over a month of one another, which seem to me to sketch an outline of the general shape of the trend: Rob Reiner's *Stand by Me*, released commercially in the United States on 8 August, and David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, released on 19 September. Both are named for songs: the former for Ben E. King's 1961 song of the same name; the latter for Bobby Vinton's 1963 version of 'Blue Velvet'. *Stand by Me* is set in 1959, the film on the cusp of the 1960s, its protagonists on the cusp of adulthood, although the main narrative is set up within a frame, recalled from 1985. Though notionally *Blue Velvet* is set in the present of the film's release, musically it

[1] Allan F. Moore, *The Beatles: Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 47.

points to the period between 1962 and 1963: as well as the Vinton version of the title track, Roy Orbison's 'In Dreams' (1963) and Ketty Lester's 1962 version of 'Love Letters' take prominent roles. Not only that, but the Angelo Badalamenti score borrows from Henry Mancini's score for Blake Edwards's *Experiment in Terror* (1962), one of the neo-noir visual sources for *Blue Velvet* more generally. *Experiment in Terror* is, almost certainly non-coincidentally, set in a town called Twin Peaks, a name that Lynch will, in short order, also borrow.[2] Both films are driven by the encounter, too young, with the reality of death, an encounter which marks the end of childhood in the former (a childhood which is mourned: 'I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve. Jesus, does anyone?', the narrator, Gordie Lachance, says) and a horror at the dark underbelly of US society – the order symbolised by the white picket fence is *always* an illusion, the opening sequence insists – in the latter. I'm going to keep coming back to these two different modes of nostalgia. In fact, just as Derrida says about the way the present is haunted by the ghost of the past, nostalgia 'begins by coming back'.[3]

'At first glance', Svetlana Boym's classic account of nostalgia claims, 'nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams', a dyad which might be fused together to form a dreamed, an imagined, or fantasised childhood. More, it is – an idea which will become of increasing salience in what follows – a 'rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress'.[4] Nostalgia is, on the one hand, 'a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear boundaries and values',[5] but it is also 'a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is [. . .] a romance with one's own fantasy'.[6] The symbolic order of that idealised neighbourhood never existed, never *could have* existed, save within the halcyon myth of nostalgia itself.

If Reiner and Lynch were a sort of vanguard, it did not take too long for others to follow, and expand the sort of more popular-more serious dyad that the pair, *Stand by Me* and *Blue Velvet*, already suggests. To pick only a few examples, for instance, hip hop trio The Fat Boys 1987 cover of the Surfaris's 1963 'Wipeout' – featuring the Beach Boys, simultaneously the epitome of the California Sound and one of a tiny number of bands to continue their success

[2] Matt Pearson, 'Blue Velvet', in Matt Pearson, *Authorship and the Films of David Lynch* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), www.britishfilm.org.uk/lynch/blue_velvet.html, last accessed: 17 July 2024.

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, tr. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994 [1993]), 11.

[4] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, NY: Basic, 2001), xv.

[5] Ibid, 8.

[6] Ibid, xiii.

in the face of the British Invasion in 1963 and 1964 – was succeeded the following year by a no more edifying cover of Chubby Checker's 'The Twist', joined by Checker, who had, as a result, his first successful single since 1963's 'Hooka Tooka'.[7] 1987 also saw the release of breakout Australian soap opera star Kylie Minogue's first single, 'The Loco-Motion', a cover of Little Eva's Gerry Goffin and Carole King-penned 1962 hit. In 1990, Kylie released a cover of Little Anthony and the Imperial's 1958 doo-wop hit 'Tears on My Pillow'. The peak – or nadir, for preference – of this version of the trend might be found in a sequence of novelty mash-up-*cum*-medleys released under the moniker Jive Bunny and the Mastermixers, especially the rock 'n' roll of 'Swing the Mood' and 'That's What I Like' (both 1989), featuring both 'Wipeout' and 'The Twist' (and Checker's 'Let's Twist Again'), amongst many others, like The Ventures' theme from the 1968 series, *Hawaii Five-O*.

What's true for pop is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for rock. The Pixies' 'Cecilia Ann' is a cover of a Surftones song from 1964, while 'Ana' – from the same Pixies album, 1991's *Bossa Nova* – isn't a surf pop cover, but sounds like it could be. The band regularly played a slightly slower version of 1988's 'Wave of Mutilation' live, which reveals the up-tempo version for the surf rock it is, under the hood. The Pixies, if they didn't invent the quiet-loud song structure – Hüsker Dü, at least, were probably just about there first – certainly brought it to the attention of Nirvana, the video for whose 'In Bloom', the fourth single from 1991's *Nevermind*, parodies the performances of, precisely, British Invasion bands, specifically the Dave Clark Five, on TV variety shows, most obviously and overtly, *The Ed Sullivan Show*.[8] Though Kurt Cobain didn't pick this element up from them, the Pixies' Joey Santiago's guitar tone regularly evokes that of Hank Marvin of The Shadows, who, aside from being Cliff Richard's backing band, had a string of top ten hits in the United Kingdom in their own right, beginning with 'Apache' in 1960 until 1964's 'The Rise and Fall of Flingel Bunt'.

Staying in the United Kingdom, by 1989 the so-called Second Summer of Love was well underway, the MDMA-infused acid house scene, centred in Manchester, explicitly signalling its debt (and its allegiance) to the original Summer of Love in 1967 San Francisco. The Happy Mondays' 'Step On' was a reinvention – it goes rather beyond being a cover, I think – of John Kongos's 1971 'He's Gonna Step on You Again', and the same band's 'Donovan' samples

[7] Tom Smucker, *Why the Beach Boys Matter* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018), 49.

[8] Everett True, *Live Through This: American Rock Music in the Nineties* (London: Virgin, 2001), 40. The Dave Clark Five were the second British Invasion band to appear on The Ed Sullivan Show, after the Beatles, and were ultimately on the show eighteen times, making them the show's most featured band.

the 1966 single 'Sunshine Superman' by the popstar of the same name, one of the first releases of the nascent psychedelia movement. While The Charlatans' debut album, *Some Friendly* (1990), gestures towards the Beatles of the mid 1960s throughout – 'Opportunity' a sort of cousin of 'Tomorrow Never Knows' (1966), for example – the biggest single from the album, 'The Only One I Know', borrows much more explicitly, lyrically and melodically, from The Byrds' 'Everybody's Been Burned' (1966). Candy Flip's cover of the Beatles' 'Strawberry Fields Forever' (1967), released, again, in 1990, was a fairly major hit in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and a minor one in the United States. In the broader alternative rock scene, the Wonder Stuff's 1991 cover of Tommy Roe's 'Dizzy' (1969) was a hit across Europe, reaching the top spot in the United Kingdom through the ministries, in part, of its guest lead vocalist, the alternative comedian Vic Reeves. The original had been a number one hit in the United States too. Jimi Hendrix – both in his guitar tone and image – was a widespread point of reference: 'Voodoo Child (Slight Return)' (1968) features prominently in *Withnail and I* (1987), the film itself set in 1969, while 'Foxy Lady' underpinned the new version of Ice T's 'Freedom of Speech', originally released in 1989. This version closed later releases of his collaboration with Ernie C, metal band Body Count's eponymous 1992 debut album, replacing the song originally slated to be the title track, 'Cop Killer'. Lenny Kravitz was compared to Hendrix from as early as his debut, *Let Love Rule* (1989). Part of the comparison early on may well have been a plainly racist one – based on little more than the fact that both were Black rock guitarists – though it's also the case that Kravitz covered Hendrix's 'If 6 Was 9' (1969) live from early days and, within a few years, released his 'Are You Gonna Go My Way?' (1993), which, while it's no cover, sounds rather like a riff on Hendrix's 'Fire' (1967).[9] Hendrix's original 'If 6 Was 9' was his contribution to the soundtrack of *Easy Rider* (1969), appearing again as a part of the soundtrack for 1991's *Point Break*.

There's a raft of mainstream films with musical themes that draw the same temporal link, from the late 1980s to the mid 1960s. 1988's *Buster* is set in 1963 – its theme that year's Great Train Robbery – and stars the now-almost inexplicably ubiquitous in the 1980s Phil Collins as the title character, Buster Edwards: 'A Groovy Kind of Love', one of Collins's hits from the soundtrack, was originally released by Diane & Annita in 1965 (with a bonus e in 'groo-vey'), but is rearranged to remove any trace of the 1960s and make it sound like a product of the 1980s; by contrast, 'Two Hearts' was an *original* song, written

[9] See, for instance, Alan Sculley, 'He's Gonna Go His Way!', *Crisis*, vol. 100, no. 8 (1993), 27 & 32.

for the soundtrack, but arranged to sound like it might have been recorded in the mid 1960s, with a music video to match, which manages to be somehow both sillier and more po-faced than Nirvana's 'In Bloom' parody. 1990's *Mermaids* repeats the formula: it, too, is set in 1963 and features Cher – already a star by the mid 1960s – both as the lead character's mother and on the soundtrack, covering a 1963 Rudy Clark track, 'The Shoop Shoop Song (It's in His Kiss)'.

Dirty Dancing (1987) is set, again, in 1963, though it looks like it's still the 1950s (and perhaps, in truth, an awful lot of the early 1960s still *looked* like more stereotyped ideas of the 1950s), but is also, unmistakably, simultaneously set in the 1980s. Though it *is* a fairy-tale – poor boy marries rich girl through the magic of dance – it's a Reaganite one: Patrick Swayze's Johnny is thoroughly convinced that not only is his working-class status a problem but also that the union is somehow at fault for putting a block on the class mobility of anyone who isn't a union member. The soundtrack – 1980s power ballads 'Hungry Eyes' and '(I've Had) The Time of My Life' juxtaposed against 'Wipe Out' and The Contours' 'Do You Love Me' (1962) – only underscores the temporal displacement.[10] John Waters's *Hairspray* pulls more or less the same trick, released a year later, in 1988, and set a year earlier in 1962, if from a progressive rather than reactionary angle, featuring both a body positivity largely unthinkable in the film's setting – the Fat Acceptance movement didn't get going until five years later – and simultaneously 'correct[ing] the narrative according to which Elvis gets most of the glory for teaching white teenyboppers how to shake their butts and directs attention back to the musical sources of this cultural revolution: the black communities with which they coexisted but of which they remained largely ignorant'.[11]

On television, *The Wonder Years* first aired at the beginning of 1988, but is set precisely twenty years earlier, the opening credits deploying visually home video-style footage, evoking the Kodak Super 8 (or perhaps actually made with one, which would probably have been the simplest way to achieve the effect), accompanied by Joe Cocker's version of the Beatles' 'With a Little Help from My Friends', actually released a little later than the summer of 1968 setting of the first episode, in October of that year, but cemented into popular consciousness by festival performances the following year at Woodstock and the Isle of Wight Festival. As it happens, the same song had been a United Kingdom

[10] Cynthia Baron and Mark Bernard, '*Dirty Dancing* as Reagan-Era Cinema and "Reaganite Entertainment"', in Yannis Tzioumakis and Siân Lincoln (eds.), *The Time of Our Lives: Dirty Dancing and Popular Culture* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 87–104.

[11] Elizabeth M. Matelski, *Reducing Bodies: Mass Culture and the Female Figure in Postwar America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 133–34; Robert Storr, 'Queering the Pitch', in Kristen Hileman (ed.), *John Waters: Indecent Exposure* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 108–22 (113).

number one earlier in 1988, courtesy of Wet Wet Wet's cover of it on *Sgt. Pepper Knew My Father*, a complete re-recording of the Beatles' album which is, put most charitably, of variable quality, though The Fall's version of 'A Day in the Life' and Sonic Youth's rendering of 'Within You Without You' are both rather better than mere curios in their respective catalogues.

David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* was first broadcast in 1990, set in a rural Washington community which is, simultaneously, the present and, too, that period of the 1960s, mentioned above, that still feels like the 1950s (or, perhaps, the town has remained essentially stalled twenty-five years or so before the present, an idea riffed on in the very late continuation of the show, in a third season set twenty-five years after the cancellation of the original after its second). Lynch's next film, *Wild at Heart* (1990), not only features an Elvis-obsessed (and Elvis-quiffed) Nicolas Cage, and also regularly gestures to Elvis's own movies – though he was a star of the 1950s, the majority of his films come from the following decade, even if they too *feel* like they still have to do with the 1950s – but also made a hit out of Chris Isaak's 'Wicked Game', a song recorded in 1989, but, again, which feels an awful lot like a track from twenty-five years earlier.

In truth, this isn't the music I mean to write about here. This is really an upbeat to a larger theme, but what I want to point to above all is that, at some point between about 1986 and 1991, popular music (popular culture in general, in fact) becomes – I think pretty much out of nowhere – deeply obsessed not with, as might be the case, finding older songs which might be covered in new ways but, rather, with the excavation of its own past. From having been music concerned with a commitment to the present or to futurity, the shift seems to be a radical one, from building (upwards, forwards) to exhumation (downwards, backwards). The change seems to me to be *so* seismic that it's worth thinking about what it might mean, especially for anyone who might want to write music after that point regardless of what sort of music that might be.

1 Not Really Now Not Any More

In part, there's a fairly boring, infrastructural cause: from 1985 or thereabouts, music which had already been released on vinyl and on cassette was re-released on the new compact disc format. People were invited to *replace* the music they already had on vinyl with a 'modern' – somehow better, 'perfected' – version, buffed up and polished, even if this was music they already knew well. The promise of even higher fidelity to some sort of artistic 'truth', then, was part of the way in which the music industry created – and needed, in order to maximise its profits – a market for the *re-consumption* of the music of the past, naturally, in

the process, creating an increased sense of what music from that past it was most important to keep present, to summon up *in the present*.[12]

At the same time, after Mikhail Gorbachev's election as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics moved towards economic and social liberalisation, introducing elements of a market economy, enabling greater freedom of speech, and negotiating reductions in nuclear arms stockpiling with United States.[13] This led to new artistic freedoms, too. For instance, the Soviet synthpop band Альянс (Alyans), blacklisted in 1984 and whose music had only ever been available via *magnitizdat* tapes to avoid official censure, were able to perform in public: their 'На заре' ('At Dawn') (1987) – which, in its original version bears comparison with, say, A-ha's 'Take On Me' (1985), in my view – could be broadcast on state television, on the *Взгляд* (*Outlook*) programme, even though the dawn the song was pointing to lyrically seems to have been, precisely, a post-Soviet one.[14]

There were voluble protests against Russian hegemony across the Eastern Bloc. Between November 1988 and July 1989, the Baltic States had declared their state sovereignty; between March and May the following year, one by one they would declare their independence from Russia *in toto*: first Lithuania, next Estonia, then Latvia.[15] Across 1989, the other Warsaw Pact countries, too, began to disentangle themselves from Moscow, largely without significant violence, save in the last to turn, Romania, where Nicolae Ceaușescu hung on until almost Christmas: in the end, after a show trial, he was executed along with his wife Elena on Christmas Day 1989.[16] The comparatively peaceful transitions that took place ought probably to be seen as, at least in part, an active decision on behalf of the Gorbachev administration: he did not, as previous Soviet leaders had done, take direct political and military action to stem the dissent. Whether Gorbachev *intended* the collapse of the Soviet Union or not, he enabled it in ways none of his predecessors would have done.[17]

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[12] See Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever: The Story of Recorded Music* (London: Granta, 2009), 185–236 for an account.

[13] John Miller, *Mikhail Gorbachev and the End of Soviet Power* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

[14] For a general overview, see Darya Borisovna Tereshkina, 'Безглагольность как Архетипическая Модель Русской Поэзии: от А. Фета к О. Парастаеву', *Палимпсест: Литературоведческий журнал*, vol. 1, no. 4 (2019), 90–102. Tereshkina reckons that the Russian listener will hear the echo of Afanasy Fet's poem of the same name – the first line runs: 'На заре ты её не буди' – in the song.

[15] Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[16] Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[17] Jacques Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberating of Eastern Europe*, tr. Keith Martin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

The sequence of national defections to the West this precipitated, it seemed *in the West*, was figured symbolically in the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989.[18] As former Soviet Socialist Republics asserted their autonomy – Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Uzebkistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Russia itself, and, last, Kazakhstan declared they would leave the USSR – it led to an apparent end both of the division of the world into Western and Eastern Blocs (led by the United States and the USSR, respectively) and to the present threat of nuclear warfare, fundamental facts about what the world *was* and how it worked for near enough half a century, ones which almost no-one growing up under them had any expectation would change significantly, even if there was plenty of flux in exactly how much openness there was between one side and another. More generally, there was no precise uniformity with respect to cultural or social restrictions across the Soviet sphere of influence: the rock band September, in comparatively liberal Yugoslavia, released a sequence of albums in the second half of the 1970s which were hardly *that* distant from Soft Machine, say, while Hungary's Omega not only sounded like they were operating in the wake of The Who, they also released albums in English as well as Hungarian, to capitalise on their international audience. Their 1973 release in this strain literally substituted the Greek letter omega, conventionally signifying the end, in place of the hammer and sickle on its USSR flag-styled cover. Both were able to tour, September performing music which sounded pretty much like Western popular music in the Eastern Bloc, including Cuba, and Omega performing music *from* the Eastern Bloc in the West.[19] By contrast, though, the Soviets banned Lativa's Pērkons within two years of their 1981 formation, though they carried on performing regardless.[20]

The political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, reckoned that the collapse of the Soviet world presaged what he called 'The End of History', first of all, in 1989, in a lecture, then a short article and then, a couple of years later, a longish book. His underlying argument was summarised in the book-length version's introduction,

> that a remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world over the past few years, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism,

[18] Jeffrey A. Engel (ed.), *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[19] Izak Špajzer, 'Zgodovina jazza na Slovenska', unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Ljubljana, 2019, 52–53; Iván Miklós Szegő, 'The "Serbian Connection" in the Age of the Beat Revolution in Hungary', *Musikologija*, vol. 27 (2019), 187–202 (194).

[20] Pekka Gronow and Jānis Daugavietis, 'Pie laika . . . Now is the time. The singing revolution on Latvian radio and television', *Popular Music*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2020), 270–93 (279–81).

> and most recently communism. More than that [. . .] liberal democracy may constitute the 'end point of mankind's ideological evolution' and the 'final form of human government', and as such [. . .] the 'end of history'.[21]

What Fukuyama meant, to be clear, was not that, since 'everyone' agreed that liberal democracy was the best conceivable governmental system, there would henceforth be no further conflict of any serious kind, nor did he mean that countries which had already adopted liberal democratic principles were free of injustice, but rather that the *argument* which underpinned questions of political ideology had been won: there was no longer, Fukuyama reckoned, any disagreement about the ideals of liberty, equality, personal individual freedom, and so on, including what seems almost a natural process, a 'universal evolution in the direction of capitalism', by which token he means specifically, globalised, free market, laissez-faire capitalism.[22] The end of History – stridently capitalised – he pointed towards did not indicate that there would be no future historical events, but that the particular model of history, conceived of by Hegel and Marx alike as a dialectical process, fought or negotiated between two opposing models, the last of which was that between the communist east and the liberal democratic West, was over, because the dialectic had resolved in favour of one side of its final pair. Fukuyama would later resile from such triumphalism, at least a little, in the light of the Brexit referendum and the 2016 United States presidential election.[23] He might have noted, too, that the number of African nations which moved towards liberal democracy was very small: Botswana, Gambia, Mauritius, Namibia, and Senegal.[24] At the time, however, what Fukuyama had to say didn't seem *especially* outrageous, at least in the West, and his detractors there largely disputed Fukuyama's *interpretation* of the End of History, rather than the idea that, symbolically at least, the end of the Cold War marked a signal change in what history was and how it ought to be understood.

The music I dealt with in the Introduction seems to me, at least in retrospect, to function almost as a sort of early warning for these events, having more to do with politics – if obliquely – than the sonic surfaces of those musics might suggest. The frame of reference is rather specific, clustering around the years 1962–63 and 1967–68. Moreover, the former time period occurs much more often in the context of the United States and the latter in the context of the

[21] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, NY: Free, 1992), xi. Fukuyama is quoting here from his own 1989 essay.
[22] Ibid, xv.
[23] Francis Fukuyama, 'America: The Failed State', *Prospect*, no. 250 (2017), 30–35.
[24] James Mark, Bogdan C. Iacob, Tobias Rupprecht, and Ljubica Spaskovska, *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 225.

United Kingdom. These moments seem to me to be important ones in the political histories of these respective countries. The same sort of loss of *personal* innocence that *Blue Velvet* and *Stand By Me* take as their theme is an echo of the loss of national innocence that was widely held – at the time and in the decades that followed – to be a consequence of the assassination of president John F. Kennedy on 22 November 1963.[25] In the United Kingdom, 1968 marks the symbolic end of the British colonisation of Africa and, as such, the end of the fantasy of Britain's preeminent status in the world: in October 1968, the Colonial Office was subsumed into the new Foreign and Commonwealth Office.[26] This should be viewed, too, in the context of the humiliating devaluation of sterling the previous year,[27] leading to James Callaghan's resignation as Chancellor of the Exchequer (though, admittedly, he and Roy Jenkins in effect simply swapped roles, Jenkins becoming Chancellor, while Callaghan was moved to Jenkins's former post of Home Secretary), and Charles De Gaulle's veto of Britain's application to join the European Economic Community.[28] Speaking of post-Soviet Russia, Boym argues that 'mass nostalgia' represented a sort of 'nationwide midlife crisis', in a longing for 'the age of stability and normalcy'.[29] I'm not at all sure that much the same can't be said here, in a desire to return to a mythical (that's to say: completely made up) prelapsarian world of white knights and great white hopes.

Jean Baudrillard didn't dispute that history had ended. Actually, at the head of the text where he theorises this most explicitly, 'Pataphysics of the Year 2000' – the first chapter of his *The Illusion of the End* (1992) – he quotes from Elias Canetti's *Die Provinz des Menschen* (1973): 'as of a certain point, history was no longer *real*. Without noticing it, all mankind suddenly left reality; everything happening since then was supposedly not true; but we supposedly didn't notice'. Baudrillard doesn't tell his reader that the point that Canetti is referring to is, in fact, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, though it might equally well have been written in the context of the Holocaust: both show that the progress of the Enlightenment was nothing of the kind, that what was undertaken with such apparent scientific and technical progress was the very antithesis of enlightened. The end of history in 1989, Baudrillard might

[25] See, for instance, Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 18.

[26] Sarah Stockwell, *The British End of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[27] Catherine R. Schenk, *The Decline of Sterling: Managing the Retreat of an International Currency, 1945–1992* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 117–314.

[28] John Campbell, *Roy Jenkins: A Well-Rounded Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2014), 303–08; Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role, 1964–1967* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 134–62.

[29] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, NY: Basic, 2001), 58.

well be implying, *already happened* in 1945 – both in that the West 'won' the cold conflict that succeeded the hot one and that, by virtue of the nature of that victory, the victors ceased to be 'really' human – except that, in Marxian vein, if the first time round it was a tragedy, this time it was farcical.[30]

Already implied here are two of the hypotheses of the end of history that Baudrillard puts forward, both of which can, indeed, be seen as somehow proceeding from a first, unnoticed end of history coterminous with the end of the Second World War. One version of this is a metaphor of deceleration: the hot war – a *real* war, Baudrillard implies – slows; it cools and condenses into a cold war, which is never really fought, at least not directly by the antagonists. The process of slowing doesn't end with the apparent end of the Cold War, though: it continues, such that there may be events – there may be conflicts, skirmishes – but they never really result in anything, and there is certainly no sense that the resolution of any of these increasingly fragmented events in favour of one or another side will actually achieve anything as such.

On the other hand, Baudrillard proposes that it is not (or not just) that history has run down, proceeding too slowly to produce *real* meaning, but rather that events now happen *too quickly*, that history has accelerated to such a speed that it achieves a sort of escape velocity: there is not enough time to process, to make sense of events such that they coalesce into anything that might be called history. It has become 'just one fucking thing after another', as Alan Bennett misquoted Arnold J. Toynbee.[31] Every event that might, once, have been historical has its own (mediatised) narrative, but the proliferation of them, and the need to replace them with some other, newer, yet more current event, makes it impossible for the truly meaningful to occur. Every day is a historic day, Baudrillard suggests and, as such, no day is.[32]

This isn't, actually, properly separable from the development of the compact disc, Baudrillard reckons. Where his first two hypotheses of the End of History focus on speed – one too fast, one too fast – his third, the one I find most compelling, is concerned with reproduction, a reproduction which has become excessively accurate, in the advent of the high-fidelity recording. Or, more, the too-high-fidelity recording, recordings which are designed to reproduce music digitally at resolutions that go beyond the capabilities of human ears to perceive. It's a recording which is reproduced for ears which are not, in fact, ours, a recording which is, in a way, realer than real, or hyperreal, as it's normally termed in Baudrillardian argot. You might well go to a concert, a large stadium concert, where, because it's impossible to see the person or people you've

[30] Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, tr. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity, 1994 [1992]), 1.
[31] Alan Bennett, *The History Boys* (London: Faber, 2004), 85.
[32] Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, tr. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity, 1994 [1992]), 1–5.

actually gone to see, you watch them, instead, on a screen. Not only that, but you listen to them reproduce identically what is on the recording of a song you already know. It's not even a question of whether they truly are singing live or not. That's not the point, really: the point is that it's not even possible to tell, not for sure. They both may or may not actually be there. And the same is true for you, since, after all, you may well not be watching the screen anyway, but rather taking a recording of the event on a phone, nervously, anxiously trying to prove (to yourself, I think Baudrillard would say) that you really were there, even in the act of calling your actual presence into question. Baudrillard suggests that what follows the era of the real is the era of simulation and, too, that there may well be no putting the genie back into the bottle.[33] In similar vein, Philip Auslander argues that, in the case of these performances, the live as such is replaced by the affect – though he doesn't actually call it an affect – of 'liveness', while Fredric Jameson argues that filmic nostalgia approaches 'the "past" through stylistic connotation, conveying "pastness" by the glossy qualities of the image, and "1930s-ness" or "1950s-ness" by the attributes of fashion', this too a surface affect, with nothing to ground it, nothing behind it.[34]

These are, really, just symptoms: it's a pervasive phenomenon. At sports events, there's an expectation that you ought to have instant access to replays from impossible (from the perspective of wherever you may *actually* be sitting) reverse angles, that truthful, authoritative judgements about the outcomes of particular events – ball tracking, offside decisions, line calls – can be made by technologies which exceed human perceptual abilities. The live event is more intimate – and more accurate – than any *real* live event could be, but it's not a human intimacy. It's a participation in a disembodied intimacy, a mediatised, sanitised proximity: everyone is beautiful and no-one is horny, as Raquel S. Benedict insists, in an essay which also implies that the erotic real of Hollywood cinema probably vanished at some point between *Batman Returns* (1992) and *Starship Troopers* (1997).[35]

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[33] Ibid, 5–7.

[34] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge: 2008 [1999]); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 19. Strikingly, Jameson sensed this already in George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), but notes that Lucas 'set out to recapture [. . .] the henceforth mesmerizing lost reality of the Eisenhower era', though the idea of *recapturing* the past is quite different, I think, from the unmoored flat procession of signifiers of some unlocatable pastnesses which I think follows the so-called End of History. It is curious, too, that Jameson picks this, a film set in 1962, as ground zero for a nostalgia for fiftiesness, when a better and earlier – if much less rose-tinted, which isn't necessarily to say less nostalgic – film existed in the form of Peter Bogdanovich's *The Last Picture Show* (1971).

[35] Raquel S. Benedict, 'Everyone Is Beautiful and No One Is Horny', *Blood Knife*, 14 February 2021, https://bloodknife.com/everyone-beautiful-no-one-horny/, last accessed: 24 July 2024. It may be of significance that the 1959 Robert A. Heinlein novel on which Paul

Benedict reckons that part of the reason is that, in the United States at least, '[t]he attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon sparked a new War on Terror, and America needed to get in shape so we could *win that war*', and Baudrillard probably wouldn't disagree, but would point to the absurdity of getting jacked to fight a war against an abstract concept, an absurdity that gestures towards his idea that, after the end of history, it's not that wars aren't fought anymore – on the contrary – but that they are all akin to simulated reruns of conflicts that have *already taken place*. The collapse of the Soviet Union removes the very reason for the existence of the United States in the post-World War Two global order and, as such, it's necessary to find a succession of replacement 'big bads' to stand in for the real one. The Gulf War – either one, though it's striking that when the latter gets named Gulf War II, as it sometimes is, it feels like a sequel in a way that World War II doesn't – represented the key example for Baudrillard, not least because it was fought so quickly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, beginning with Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iraq's neighbour, Kuwait, only just over half a year later, on 2 August 1990, with reprisals led by United States, British, and French forces on 17 January 1991. Baudrillard's essay 'The Gulf War will not take place' was published just before the aerial bombardment of Iraq began, on 4 January 1991, but it is no peacenik essay, its title gesturing towards Jean Giraudoux's *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place* (1935), a play in which the protagonists seek to prevent a conflict the audience knows is inevitable. It was succeeded by two other essays, 'The Gulf War: is it really taking place?' and 'The Gulf War did not take place', the titles of all three apparently contradicted by actual events. But Baudrillard's argument is that, for all sorts of reasons, this was not a real war, not in the historical sense. On the one hand, the outcome was already known well in advance: the Western allies suffered a minuscule proportion of the total casualties of the First Gulf War, and close to a quarter of the United States casualties were a result of friendly fire. There was no possibility whatsoever of a negative outcome to the war from the Allied perspective and, in that sense, Baudrillard argued, this was not a war in the sense the word had normally been used but, rather, a simulation of a war.

It was a simulation in a second, and, from my perspective, more significant, sense too. The military technology which allows wars to be fought became indistinguishable from that which had simulated it in advance: the real thing looked *just like* its simulation (both of which, in turn, looked conspicuously like the video games which enabled noncombatants to play along). Watching a drone

Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* was based insists that the United States requires *more* nuclear weapons rather than fewer, implicitly arguing for the desirability of a future fascist America.

strike on a computer screen looks pretty much the same whether it really happened or not: it's more or less impossible to tell the difference between the two; a possibility which seemed a dystopian fantasy in *Wargames* (1983) becomes normative.

Moreover, the distance of war reporting is reduced to a tiny degree: the viewer is able to watch, practically live, footage of bombs being dropped on targets, though the immediacy of this footage disguises the actual suffering of those on whom the bombs fall. Not only that but also the war as such was fought, from the Western perspective, on television, through the media. There was no prospect of any winner other than the Western allies and, as such, what matters is not that fact, but the interpretation of it, a truth generated entirely by and on television.[36]

The ubiquity of Gulf War footage and its proximity to both entertainment and saturation became one of the explicit focusses of U2's Zoo TV tour, between 1992 and 1993, a show in which the band was introduced to the accompaniment of The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy's 'Television, the Drug of a Nation' (1992):

> Television, the drug of the Nation
> Breeding ignorance and feeding radiation
> [. . .]
> T.V. is the reason why less than ten percent of our
> Nation reads books daily
> Why most people think Central America
> means Kansas
> Socialism means unamerican
> and Apartheid is a new headache remedy

An immediate precedent appeared to have happened, Baudrillard reckoned, in Timişoara, during the Romanian revolution against communism: footage of what seemed to be evidence of mass murder of anti-communist protesters on behalf of the state leveraged the charges of genocide against the Ceauşescus, which led to their execution. Though the police did fire on the Timişoara protesters, killing in the region of a hundred, the footage gave the impression that the vast indiscriminate slaughter of perhaps thousands, regardless of age, had taken place, but it later transpired that many of the dead had been exhumed, having died some time earlier and were not victims of this event, *even if* they were victims of the regime more generally. The footage was never shown in Romania but it was reported as if it were incontrovertible fact by radio stations

[36] Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, tr. Paul Patton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995 [1991]); see, too, Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light*, tr. Michael Degener (London: Continuum, 2002 [1991]).

that could be received easily there, like Radio Free Europe. Baudrillard is less concerned by the question of the ultimate truth – what *really* happened in Timişoara – than he is by the fact that there is no functional distinction to be made between the evidence which proves the events happened as reported and those which show them to have been faked for the cameras: the real thing and the conspiracy theory *look* more or less the same.[37] In 1971, Gil Scott-Heron had proclaimed that the revolution would not be televised but, of course, it was, and there were, in fact, 'highlights on the eleven o'clock news', NBC (or any other news channel) perfectly well could 'predict the winner', and the revolution would in fact be 'right back after a message' from all manner of corporate sponsors. The revolution would not only be televised, it would be rerun again, and again. After all, the script was already pretty familiar.

Though it looks, probably, like this is somehow to do with the past, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi called it, instead, 'the cancellation of the future'.[38] If free-market capitalism allied to liberal democracy really is the best, most perfect, and final state of human political development, notwithstanding the radical inequalities of not only actual and cultural capital but also fundamental rights between various peoples it allows to persist, that also means that all of the utopian futures imagined within the postwar consensus, by democratic socialist and social democratic governments (and, indeed, from time to time conservative or even revolutionary socialist ones) – an end to want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness, as the British Liberal politician William Beveridge formulated it in the signal report that laid the framework for the United Kingdom's postwar welfare state – must also be annulled.[39] Not only had you never had it so good, you could never have it better. You might feel entitled to ask: is this it?

Berardi is, naturally, sceptical: 'I am not referring to the direction of time', he stresses, which is to say that, of course, time as a physical fact continues unabated. There is, there will be, in any literal sense, a future. What he suggests has been overturned is, precisely, the 'psychological perception' that a future might exist which is, in a fundamental sense, different from – more to the point, *better than* – the present.[40] Berardi wasn't unclear as to whom he thought the cancellation of the future – the end of history – benefitted: 'It wants us to be dejected: not so catatonically depressed we can't work, but not so confident and secure that we will refuse to do bullshit jobs', was Mark Fisher's pithy summary

[37] Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, tr. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity, 1994 [1992]), 54–61.
[38] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *After the Future* (Oakland, CA: AK, 2011), 18.
[39] For a comprehensive account, see Derek Fraser, *The Beveridge Report: Blueprint for the Welfare State* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023).
[40] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *After the Future* (Oakland, CA: AK, 2011), 18.

of Berardi's position. This disembodied 'it' stands for, he drily added, 'the real management of the Overlook Hotel of course'.[41] Elsewhere he recalls that Jack – the caretaker of the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* in either Stephen King's or Stanley Kubrick's version – is *told* that he has 'always been the caretaker', appearing *as* the caretaker, impossibly, in a photo taken more than fifty years before the setting of novel or film, and thus perpetuating, over and over again, both symbolic and actual violence, from the hands of those ostensibly there to protect, against the bodies of the vulnerable.[42]

It seems to me that, in this, Fisher is pointing towards Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's claim that 'there are no longer even any masters, but only slaves commanding other slaves. [. . .] The bourgeois sets the examples [. . .]: more utterly enslaved than the lowest of the slaves, he is the first servant of the ravenous machine, the beast of the reproduction of capital. [. . .] "I too am a slave" – these are the new words spoken by the master'.[43] In fact, the first chapter of Fisher's own *Capitalist Realism* takes as its title the expression Fisher attributes to both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek: 'It is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.'[44] The subtitle of the whole book, *Is There No Alternative?*, recalls Margaret Thatcher's concrete assertion that, so far as the supremacy of capitalism over socialism was concerned, the answer was that no, there was not.

In the BBC's *Life on Mars* (2006–08), Detective (Chief) Inspector Sam Tyler is struck by a car in the present of the series' production and wakes up, inexplicably, thirty-three years earlier. At first horrified by the casual misogyny, the excessive drinking and smoking, and the lack of almost everything he regards as a convenience of contemporary life, when he is offered the opportunity to return to *his* present, he chooses instead to remain in 1973, a couple of years after the release of the David Bowie song which gave the show its title. In fact, on a certain reading, Tyler would literally rather commit suicide than be compelled to live in 2006. The 1970s may have been awful, the show implies, but at least it was better than a present which had no future.

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[41] Mark Fisher, 'Pain Now', in Darren Ambrose (ed.), *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)* (London: Repeater, 2018 [2015]), 501–05 (503).

[42] Mark Fisher, '"You Have Always Been the Caretaker": The Spectral Spaces of the Overlook Hotel', in Darren Ambrose (ed.), *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)* (London: Repeater, 2018 [2007]), 140–47 (144–47).

[43] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1983 [1972]), 254. Fisher quotes this passage in 'Suffering with a Smile' (in Darren Ambrose (ed.), *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)* (London: Repeater, 2018 [2013], 472–74 (472)) and I have maintained in my quotation of it precisely the ellipses he introduces.

[44] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley: O, 2009), 1.

When Fisher first saw the video for the Arctic Monkeys' 'I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor' (2006), he said that he

> genuinely believed that it was some lost artefact from *circa* 1980. Everything in the video – the lighting, the haircuts, the clothes – had been assembled to give the impression that this was a performance on BBC2's 'serious rock show' *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. Furthermore, there was no discordance between the look and the sound. At least to a casual listen[er], this could quite easily have been a postpunk group from the early 1980s. Certainly, if one performs a version of the thought experiment I described above, it's easy to imagine 'I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor' being broadcast on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* in 1980, and producing no sense of disorientation in the audience. Like me, they might have imagined that the references to '1984' in the lyrics referred to the future.[45]

Apart from the fact that, to my eye, it looks even more like *The Tube*, specifically The Jam's performance on the first edition, broadcast on 5 November 1982, there's nothing to argue with here. There's the same sort of temporal gap between 'I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor' and *The Tube* as there is between the music I discussed in the introduction, but the difference is stark: for all there's an obsessive interest in pop music's past in that earlier period, you can always tell the difference. When Nirvana evoke *The Ed Sullivan Show*, you're in no doubt that their music could never have graced Sullivan's stage. As Fisher says, with 'I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor' that distance has collapsed. Of course, the Arctic Monkeys never played *The Tube*, never *could have* played *The Tube*; but if they *had*, no-one watching in 1982 would have been too surprised. As Fisher stresses, '[t]here *ought* to be something astonishing about this', but, by and large, there isn't.[46]

It's just one example of many. Fisher confesses that hearing Mark Ronson and Amy Winehouse's 2007 cover of The Zutons' 2006 'Valerie' caused him brief confusion, as he thought that, perhaps, he'd been mistaken and The Zutons' indie track was actually a cover of some obscure late 1960s northern soul track, or even, in fact, a missing track from The Jam, given how closely it tracks 'Town Called Malice' (1982).[47] In fact, one way of making sense of what Fisher heard is to say that Mark Ronson's version of 'Valerie' is, in essence, if impossibly, a Zutons song covered by The Jam. Except that, again, there's no way in which this is playing with historical distance. On the contrary, these recordings are timeless, and that's not meant here as a compliment: they seem to

[45] Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero, 2014), 9–10.
[46] Ibid, 10. My italics. [47] Ibid, 10–11.

proceed from some sort of neverwhen, in some vague period of when pop music really mattered.

They're far from alone. In fact, the most mainstream of the mainstream is where this can be seen in its fullest flood: Adele's 'Rolling in the Deep' (2011), Taylor Swift's 'Red' (2012), Mark Ronson's 'Uptown Funk' (2014), Ed Sheeran's 'Shape of You' (2017), Lewis Capaldi's 'Someone You Loved' (2018), Dua Lipa's 'Levitating' (2020), Olivia Rodrigo's 'bad idea right?' (2023), Chappell Roan's 'Good Luck, Babe' (2024), Billie Eilish's 'Birds of a Feather' (2024), Sabrina Carpenter's 'Espresso' (2024), and no shortage of other examples – I could go on, but won't – *aren't* covers, but *might as well be*. In fact, they more or less might be perfectly – *impossibly* perfectly – rendered remasterings of recordings from the past. The question which was raised around potential plagiarism in 'Levitating', say, misses the point entirely: it's not clear that plagiarism is even possible with music that is so radically opposed to the very idea of progressive originality.

'Adele's recordings', Fisher argues (though he could be referring to any number of other artists), 'are saturated with a vague but persistent feeling of the past without recalling any specific historic moment'.[48] This is music that Fisher reckons you might reasonably have expected to have been marketed as 'retro', but wasn't, and was, in point of fact, marketed as being entirely of the now. In a way perhaps it is, since the now isn't what it was.[49] If, on the one hand, there might be a criticism of this strand of popular music – that with its forebears, you could always tell when it was from, pretty accurately, and now you can't – then, on the other, the distinctive aural signature of this music – the thing that lets you know when it's from – is that you can't quite tell when it's from. But it's also – just like that history – silent on the fact that, truth be told, it *shouldn't be here*. It draws no attention to the fact that it is symptomatic precisely of the cancellation of the future, that this is a sort of high-definition rerun of something you already know, the director's cut, deluxe edition, digitally remastered second half of the twentieth century redux. This is a sort of nostalgia without nostalgia: there's no loss, since the past is *right here*, but it's also not a past that's specific enough that you'd really miss it if it weren't.

On television, too, something very similar might be seen, perhaps at its zenith in *Stranger Things* (2016–25), ostensibly *set* in the 1980s, but the sense of it as any sort of period piece undermined by the welter of filmic allusions which fly past, some themselves 'period' – *Ghostbusters* (1984) costumes, the release of *Day of the Dead* (1985), Max's love for Kate Bush's 'Running Up that Hill' (1985) – some subcutaneous – costuming which evokes *Risky Business* (1983)

[48] Ibid, 14. [49] Ibid, 10.

or *Pretty in Pink* (1986); character backgrounds which recall *The Breakfast Club* (1985) or the *It* miniseries (1990) – but some much more nebulous. The most obvious example of this can be found in the opening credits themselves, which, yes, do seem to gesture towards the covers of Stephen King's novels, as published in the 1980s, styled as if somewhere between the opening credits of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) and James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), but where, nonetheless, the effect (and, too, affect) generated is the feeling that this represents a *specific* reference, but the specificity is absent. More, the disparity between the references which are to a world which is contemporaneous with its ostensible setting and those to filmic representations which seem to have bled, as it were, into the real – this is the real/this cannot be the real – produce that same effect, that this is a sort of super-saturated, high-gloss remix of the greatest hits of the 1980s.

Cobra Kai (2018–25) deploys comparable approaches but from a different perspective: notionally set in the present – the stars of *The Karate Kid* films (1984–89) are played by the same people they were in those films, now leading more-or-less adult lives, with young families of their own – but the narrative tropes of *Cobra Kai* remain those of the movies, especially the 'enemies become friends to defeat even greater enemy' paradigm which is riven through the whole at multiple structural levels: it is underpinned by the filmic logic of the 1980s in a way which makes its contemporaryness feel like it exists in a state of heightened unbelievability. Something similar occurs in *Sex Education* (2019–23), in that, though it is set in a contemporary United Kingdom, especially in the earlier seasons the school setting of the show is not and could not be a British one, drawing instead explicitly on the high school tropes and tribes of John Hughes, most obviously *The Breakfast Club*. In neither case, though, is it particularly significant that the 1980s is still here, thirty years later: it simply is.

More potent (and more knowing) in this way might be *The End of the Fucking World* (2017–19), set in a present United Kingdom, but with a production design that is styled throughout to evoke the 1970s, such that when contemporary technologies like mobile phones appear they feel genuinely jarring: more progressive, actually, than *Stranger Things*, *Cobra Kai*, or *Sex Education*, it seems to me that, in the same breath, *The End of the Fucking World* draws attention to the way in which it might be the contemporary that the viewer finds weird or out of place. This effect, though, dissipates in the second season, increasingly distant from a 'real' 1970s, as the styling recalls Lynch or Quentin Tarantino, a pastness that is always at one remove from its apparent referent. The show's North American cousin, *I Am Not Okay with This* (2020) – disappointingly, I think, cancelled after a single season – pulls almost exactly the same trick, but amplified through

interweaving the progressive sexual politics of the present and, faintly redolent of *Stranger Things*, a lead character whose psychokinetic powers recall, at first, *Carrie* (1976) and then, more, *Scanners* (1981). Again, though, it is the *present* which feels out of place, an attitude I'll come back to in the next section.

It's probably worth adding that, in point of fact, and far from being somehow sniffy about 'pop music today' (or, for that matter, 'television today'), I liked Lipa's *Future Nostalgia* (2020) as much as everyone else, which is to say a lot, and both 'bad idea right?' and 'Good Luck, Babe' perhaps rather more than a lot, and watched all of the TV shows mentioned here avidly. Though it's also true that I liked them, as it were, the first time round too. In an increasingly incomprehensible world, they're comforting: the things I remember are still there, still very much *present*.

But it seems to me that, apart from anything else given my age, I probably ought *not* to find current mainstream music quite so accessible, quite as immediately recognisable as I do. 'Uptown Funk', too, of course was the subject of a plethora of copyright infringement claims, all of which seem specious, since, in the same mode as 'Levitating', what is being repeated on 'Uptown Funk' is not something so historically grounded as a protectable element but, rather, something which is fundamentally *anonymous*, which is just why it sounds *like* so many things which it is not. The key distinction between this and the musics considered in the Introduction is, precisely, that question of specificity: there, it's possible to pinpoint with a high level of accuracy the points in history which are being gestured towards and for that historical distance to be both palpable and meaningful; here, the reference is nebulous, generic to the extent that distance is foreclosed, such that, *at most*, a sense of 'historiness' is evoked, but not history itself. Where there is specificity, there are *so many* references layered atop one another that the significance of any particular reference evaporates.

Baudrillard would presumably say, and I don't think he'd be wrong to, that this isn't really pop music, isn't really television, but rather its simulation: if history after the end of the Cold War tends, in the West at any rate, towards being conceived of as a sort of patchwork quilt of postwar events, repeatedly reconfigured, but without the underlying pattern ever really being changed, then this is precisely the same attitude but played out in the form of popular media. Though he doesn't want to fall into the trap of saying there can be only one dialectic, one mode of oppositionality that defines necessary teleological progress, Fisher insists that '[w]hat pop music lacks now is the capacity for *nihilation*, for producing new potentials through the negation of what already

exists'.[50] On the contrary, what already exists *is all that exists* and it's not a question of rejecting or denying any of it, but rather what particular configurations the already known can be rearranged into.

2 It's Not the End of the World

If the problem, as it were, is music which is out of time, but appears to be, as it were, perfectly normal, then you might expect a progressive response to be a music that makes very clear that it shouldn't be here, such that you can recognise it for the spectre that it is. After all, if what's being evoked isn't really, truly *your* nostalgia – and maybe even if it is, if it feels like it's really here – like any ghost, things summoned up from the past *ought* to be at least a little bit eerie: there ought to be a bit of distance between you and anything that really deserves to be called the past. With that in mind, I want to turn next to music which does just this, which makes sure you can't avoid noticing that it really ought not to be here: hauntology, a genre which takes its name from Derrida's pun on ontology, since, in spoken French, the name given to the study of being itself, *ontologie*, is more or less indistinguishable from the neologism, *hantologie*, which might mean something more like 'the way of speaking of ghosts'.

After the End of History: enter ghost, Derrida insists. In a Shakespearean exordium, Derrida recalls that Hamlet is enjoined by the ghost of his father, King Hamlet, to challenge the illegitimate, fratricidal succession to the throne of the king's brother. 'The time', as a result, 'is out of joint', an unbalancing of the scales of the world which demands redress. The spectre truly in question here, however, the title of Derrida's book makes plain, is a different father figure, Karl Marx, that same Marx whom liberal democracy and free-market economics made claim to have overthrown – to have consigned to history – for good and all.

The past cannot so simply be annulled, however. Communism was, from the very beginning, ghostly, immaterial: 'a spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism'. To be done with Stalinism is not to be done with Marxism, no matter how insistently the new rulers of world discourse may say it's so, may attempt to make 'Marxism' point univocally to this singular reading and end. For one attempt to make Marxism manifest to have failed – to have terminated ruinously – does not void the spirit which impelled it, a utopianism ranged against the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, which might still

[50] Mark Fisher, 'Is Pop Undead?', in Darren Ambrose, (ed.), *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)* (London: Repeater, 2018 [2006], 277–80 (279).

be reproduced in all manner of different configurations: Derrida's title is, after all, *Specters of Marx*; there are manifold Marxes, many possible readings of Marx. More, the idea that, in the simplest of terms, the world *could be better* becomes ever more pressing after the laissez-faire revolution, given the persistence, if not amplification, of societal ills: precarious employment, the outsourcing of labour, the legal trade in arms and illegal (but unstoppable) trafficking of drugs, the demonisation of immigrants, the valorisation of nativism, to name only a few. The moral and ethical imperative of leftist thought must be to haunt the triumphalism of, equally, neoconservative or third-way political formations, to say, and say again, that the past hoped for, *expected* better futures.[51]

In truth, I could probably make arguments similar to the ones which follow about other genres – vaporwave, chillwave, glo-fi, hypnagogic pop – and other bands or artists – the vaportrap of Blank Banshee, the surf goth of Messer Chups, the synthwave of Gunship, or coldwave of Молчат Дома, amongst many others – since they do analogous work in and about slightly different times and geographies. But I think hauntology is probably the richest of these possibilities, musically and theoretically, although I confess that that may also be because my own personal history makes it feel like it *is* conjuring the ghosts of my own past. The music of hauntology – and its broader culture too – evokes a sort of ever-present 1970s Britain, reduced almost to a series of images: drizzle, fog, smog, blackening industrial Victorian brick and decaying postwar concrete alike, folk magic and folk horror nestled against nuclear power stations and the ever-present possibility that nuclear winter might put an end to everything at any moment, strikes, blackouts, public information films to frighten you into obedience – don't swim there, don't touch that – alongside the stars of children's television, some of whom, in the event, were far more frightening than the governmental warnings. It's a bleak image, you might think, but it occupies, vitally, a time before Thatcher's election in 1979, before 'there is no alternative', which is to say, too, that the 1970s may well have been, in all sorts of respects, a decade of terror and failure but they were also a point – maybe the last point – at which different futures remained conceivable: the future had not yet been cancelled, hauntology seems to say, which is why it is *this* that haunts, or should haunt, the present, to act as a persistent reminder that the future *didn't need to be this one*. There were alternatives and, perhaps, there still are.

As early as the 1990s, not so long after the end of the Cold War, some of the most important signifiers of what became hauntology could already be heard. Releases on London's Mo' Wax label – particularly DJ Shadow's

[51] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, tr. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994 [1993]).

Endtroducing . . . (1996) – and from Bristol's trip hop scene – like Massive Attack's *Blue Lines* (1991), Tricky's *Maxinquaye* (1995), and above all Portishead's *Dummy* (1994) – inherited the use of sampled vinyl material from classic hip hop. In the forebear, however, though you can hear the medium in the sound of vinyl records being scratched, the sound of the vinyl itself is typically pristine: whether on 'The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel' (1981) or N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* (1988), the discs themselves sound as if they have had dust and static carefully removed and the turntables provided with fresh styluses. Any remaining noise is accidental: in conventional terms, vinyl crackle is undesirable. In the trip hop which followed, and in particular on *Dummy*, the reverse is the case: whether it really is or not, the sample sounds *old*. The crackle of vinyl is maintained and maybe even amplified, which is to say that on one view it's exactly what's wanted. Fisher perhaps exaggerated, but only a bit, when he described crackle as 'something like the audio-correlate of hauntology itself'.[52]

On another, though, *Dummy*'s producer, Andy Barrow, recalled that at least some people tried to return their CD copies of the album to the store where they'd bought it because it had noise on it that they vaguely recognised as the sound of old *vinyl* and recognised, too, as a sound which, somehow, ought not to be here.[53] More latterly – having released nothing since 2008 – Portishead doubled down on this resonance, releasing a bleak cover of Abba's 'SOS' (1975), for the 2015 film adaptation of Ballard's *High-Rise*: both book and film take as their theme the breakdown of social fabric in the pristine concrete tower blocks which seemed, in the postwar world, to presage a glorious utopian future. It is hard not to think that Manchester's Hulme Crescents weren't all that far from Ballard's mind, as the most immediate symbol of the concrete failure of this particular postwar dream, having begun to deteriorate almost the moment they were completed in 1972. Yet, like the disastrous collapse of Ronan Point in London a few years earlier, in 1968, this was not simply a failure of design, but also of shoddy, cost-cutting construction.[54] It's social inequality, too, that's at the heart of the failure of Ballard's high rise: rather than a new model for living, the old social order is imported into the tower block, with the poorer tenants lower down and the wealthier tenants higher up, the architect himself occupying the uttermost penthouse.

[52] Mark Fisher, 'No Future 2012 (for Nick Kilroy), in Darren Ambrose (ed.), *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)* (London: Repeater, 2018 [2008]), 638–42 (641).

[53] R. J. Wheaton, *Trip-hop* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 103–04.

[54] Paul Dobraszczyk, 'Future Cities in Literature', in Lieven Ameel (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Literary Urban Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023), 464–478 (472–73).

The first Boards of Canada release, *Music Has the Right to Children* (1998), also foregrounds the material decay of sampled material or, at any rate, the *idea* of it. Boards of Canada's Marcus Eoin recalled that

> around 1987 or 1988, we were beginning to experiment with collage tapes of demos we'd deliberately destroyed, to give the impression of chewed up library tapes that had been found in a field somewhere. That was the seed for the whole project. In those days, everyone used to have drawers full of unique cassettes with old snippets from radio and TV, it's kind of a lost thing now, sadly. To me, it's fascinating and precious to find some lost recordings in a cupboard, so part of it was an idea to create new music that really felt like an old familiar thing.[55]

A sound very much like the one that this describes pervades *Music Has the Right to Children*, though it's seemingly been faked: analogue synths, themselves vintage and perhaps not quite perfectly tuned, are recorded onto older reel-to-reel tape machines, possibly iteratively, adding warmth, yes, but also wow and flutter and the impression, above all, that the material is much older than it actually is, as if it's been sampled from a television documentary or public information film, which is precisely keyed to the Boards of Canada house style and mythology, which I'll return to presently. It could hardly be more distant, in this sense, from the ultra-clean, high-gloss digitally perfect finish of, to pick arguably the peak example, Alanis Morissette's totemic *Jagged Little Pill* (1995), the album which transformed Morissette from minor Canadian alt-rock artist to international superstar. *Jagged Little Pill* was recorded on the same Alesis ADAT machines which were allowing *most* project studios to ditch their cassette-based Tascam Portastudios in favour of a digital upgrade, while it was the sound of just these machines – including their tendency to bleed ghosts of one track into another – that Boards of Canada favoured.

There are, nonetheless, actual samples, too (and probably rather more than I list here): 'Aquarius' samples the song of the same name from *Hair* (1967), using the version released on the 1979 original soundtrack, the music by another Canadian, as it happens, Galt MacDermot; another musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, has 'The Crucifixion' plundered, apparently incongruously, on 'Happy Cycling', again using the original soundtrack release (1973, in this case); two Earth, Wind & Fire tracks – 'Getaway' (1976) and 'On Your Face' (1976) – appear in 'Sixtyten'. Perhaps most striking is the use of sampled vocal material from *Sesame Street*, largely from the 1980s, which appears in

[55] Marcus Eoin in Simon Reynolds, 'Why Boards of Canada's *Music Has the Right to Children* Is the Greatest Psychedelic Album of the '90s', *Ptichfork*, 3 April 2018, https://pitchfork.com/features/article/why-boards-of-canadas-music-has-the-right-to-children-is-the-greatest-psychedelic-album-of-the-90s/, last accessed: 7 August 2024.

'Sixtyten', 'Roygbiv', 'The Color of the Fire', and 'An Eagle in your Mind'. These are often slightly mangled, disguised, or distorted, in a way which adds to the sense that a certain sort of washed-out memory of childhood is at stake: the musical tastes of parents sit cheek by jowl with fragmentary recollections of kids' television.

The name of the group refers to the National Film Board of Canada, a major producer of documentaries on an enormous range of subjects. The two Scottish brothers who make up Boards of Canada lived in Canada relatively briefly, between 1979 and 1980 (the elder brother would have been about eight, then, and the younger six) and suggested that the memory of having seen such documentaries not only in Canada but also later, after they'd returned to Scotland, informed the sound world they tried to create. In fact, the soundtracks of the National Film Board's documentaries are enormously diverse and very rarely sound anything like Boards of Canada, but you could perhaps imagine that seeing just a couple of documentaries might have sufficed to fix the idea that *this* was the house style: Edd Kalehoff's score for 'Temples of Time' (1973) or Martin Fossum's score for 'Beluga Baby' (1978) both fit the bill pretty well. There are, too, a set of short films, which the National Film Board made for Parks Canada, with music by Alain Clavier, in the early 1980s, which have the same sort of analogue synthesiser ostinato patterns, always on the edge of oscillators drifting too far out of tune. Even so, they evidently spent enough time investigating the documentaries – their track 'Pete Standing Alone' borrows the name of the member of the Kaínaí Nation on which the film 'Standing Alone' (1982) focusses, the score for which, again, bears no relationship to the Boards of Canada sound – that it's hard to think that they could really have thought that *this* was the prevailing soundworld of those documentaries. It's enough, at any rate, that *you* think it might be.[56]

This sort of ambiguity – the difficulty in pointing towards *exactly* the source, even as it feels like something both precise and recognisable is being referenced – is precisely the point. It's a point of distinction between this music and that I focussed on at the end of the previous section: that music *remains* persistently ambiguous as to its reference points; this one feels to the listener as if the reference point is something highly specific, but just out of reach. '[I]t's no coincidence – having grown up in Canada,' Rafe Arnott says of the album's opener, 'Wildlife Analysis', 'that the track's plaintive historically-contextual synth melody pushes me back to a darkened Grade Two classroom. I close my

[56] As a wholly personal aside, I remember – or certainly think I do – the first time I heard of Boards of Canada from my friend Adam, whose pitch to me that I should listen to them was, precisely, that their music sounded just like the music of National Film Board of Canada documentaries, which *he* recalled having seen as a child (growing up, I think, between Hampshire and Sussex).

eyes and I'm sitting cross-legged with other children as we watch a canoe being paddled into a bruised, purple twilight by voyageurs – the NFB film this memory references playing through a television mounted on a wobbly stand with wheels'.[57]

And yet the music which accompanies 'The Voyageurs' (1964) bears no relationship to Boards of Canada and, in fact, the voyageurs are paddling *out* of the purple twilight, arresting though it is that this image – a mere ten seconds from a twenty-minute film – fixed itself so strongly in Arnott's memory. Unless this memory, too, is constructed, an intentional fiction played out even after a re-viewing of the documentary which reveals no such correspondence between sound and image.

Simon Reynolds's response to the album is strikingly similar, if with an underlying suspicion that things might not be quite as they seem:

> The crumbly smudges of texture, the miasmic melody lines, the tangled threads of wistful and eerie seemed to have an extraordinary capacity to trigger ultra-vivid reveries that felt like childhood memories. I would experience a flood of images that were emotionally neutral yet charged with significance, a mysticism of the commonplace and municipal: playgrounds with fresh rain stippling the swings and slides; canal-side recreation areas, with rows of saplings neatly plotted, wreathed in morning mist; housing estates with identical back gardens and young mums pegging damp wind-flapped sheets on clothing lines as clouds skidded across a cold blue winter sky. I was never sure if these were actual memories from my childhood in the late sixties and early seventies of false ones (dreamed or seen on television).[58]

The album cover appears to be a washed-out holiday snap of a family or two families – four children and three adults: two women and a man, seemingly – photographed in front of a mountain, plausibly the Mount Norquay Lookout near Banff, wearing clothes which pin them to the 1970s, and probably the later 1970s. Presumably, then, at least two of the children in the photograph are the members of Boards of Canada themselves (or the viewer is invited to think so), but the potentially cheery nostalgia is itself eroded by the touching up of the photograph that has flattened each of their faces into featurelessness.

The essential materials of hauntological musics, then, can be found in *Dummy* and *Music Has the Right to Children*, above all. The latter, in fact, is very close to what I'd think of as hauntological music 'proper', although if anything it's a little too distinctive, not *quite* anonymous enough: in the

[57] Rafe Arnott, 'Heavy Rotation: Boards of Canada – *Music Has the Right to Children*', *Resistor Magazine*, 7 May 2021, www.resistormag.com/music/heavy-rotation-boards-of-canada-music-has-the-right-to-children/, last accessed: 6 August 2024.

[58] Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (London: Faber, 2011), 331–32.

heartland of hauntology, the sounds of decaying technologies are pervasive – the pops, scratches, hiss, fuzz, flutter, wow, and crackle of analogue equipment which would have looked like the future in the 1970s – but colouring the sort of library music (or library music-like music) which was produced for use as television underscore, largely anonymously, though occasionally by actually relatively well-known musicians, like Ron Geesin, such as his *Electrosound* (1972). The Advisory Circle's 'Everyday Science (for Ron Geesin)' (2005) is an obvious echo of Geesin's own *Basic Maths* (1981–82), written for television educational programming. In both, and more generally, analogue synthesisers and sequencers – or digital replacements for them: it's impossible to be sure, and that may even be part of the point – generate the overall soundworld, sitting somewhere almost directly between the reassuring optimism of the BBC's *Tomorrow's World* – ever hopeful about the boons future technology would bring to people's everyday lives – and the scores of 1970s horror classics directed by Dario Argento or George A. Romero, 'like long-lost Cold War transmissions held in reserve in case the British government needed a reason to assure the general public that everything was okay', as Nick Neyland described The Advisory Circle, with a gentle touch of Kraftwerk, Popol Vuh, and Tangerine Dream.[59] As any viewer of *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) would already assume, if the state is going so far as to tell you that everything is going to be fine, it almost certainly isn't.

If you'd be unlikely on your own to pick out the specific Ron Geesin tracks that act as points of reference, these are intermingled with occasional reference points that you stand a rather better chance of recognising: the pair of hands creating a shadow puppet of a bird on the cover of The Advisory Circle's *As the Crow Flies* (2011) have been recoloured from the opening credits of the television adaptation of Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* (1969), a modern retelling of the Blodeuwedd myth, ostensibly for children, but amplifying the psychosexual undercurrents of the Garner novel to such an extent that it's no surprise that it sits (un)comfortably alongside ghost stories very much made for adults in the succeeding decade, like *A Woman Sobbing* (1972) or *Stigma* (1977), all of which juxtapose the modern world – as it seemed in the 1970s – and its concerns against something much more ancient.[60]

Belbury Poly's *From An Ancient Star* (2009) sits in just the same territory: against its title is set a cover image of Avebury's standing stones, making

[59] Nick Neyland, 'The Advisory Circle, *As the Crow Flies*', *Pitchfork*, 8 August 2011, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15712-as-the-crow-flies/, last accessed: 8 August 2024.

[60] Stephen Brotherstone, '"Don't Be Frightened. I Told You We Were Privileged": The British Class System in Televised Folk Horror of the 1970s', in Robert Edgar and Wayne Johnson (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Folk Horror* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024), 245–54.

reference to HTV's *Children of the Stones* (1977), which intermingles the science fiction concept of a time rift with pagan druidism, situating the heart of the temporal fault in the megalithic stone circle: here, the cover isn't a direct lift of the LP release of the soundtrack of *Children of the Stones*, though it riffs on exactly the same theme, a star set against a group of menhirs. The music is quite different too: the score for *Children of the Stones* arguably underpins the later sense that maybe it was too frightening for children, since large portions of it, sung by The Ambrosian Singers, are closer to Iannis Xenakis's *Nuits* (1968) than anything else; *From An Ancient Star* certainly sounds like it might, just about, be the original soundtrack album for a television show very much like *Children of the Stones* – even having a twelve-second ident track, probably most like the real HTV one than anything else – but with the stress significantly more heavily on the science fiction than the folk horror.

The name Belbury Poly is multi-layered too. Of course, the second element refers to the institutions which played an important role in UK tertiary education from 1969 through to 1992, which were often, nonetheless, viewed as lower quality in comparison with universities. The first element does not simply stand for some imagined English town, but stems, specifically, from the location of the sinister National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments in C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* (1945), a novel in which the malevolent scientists are as interested in the rejuvenated Merlin, timelessly preserved in Bragdon Wood, as they are in the *eldila,* who are planetary guardians, including of Malcandra (Mars) and Perelandra (Venus). The listener who has also read Lewis would tend, I think, to imagine that Belbury Polytechnic is what the National Institute ultimately became, maintaining, no doubt, the same maleficent intentions. Though Lewis could hardly have known it as he was writing, his negative portrayal of scientists willing to destroy the world in pursuit of their aims would doubtless have been read in the context of bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which occurred in the week before the publication of *That Hideous Strength*.[61]

The contents of Pye Corner Audio's *Black Mill Tapes Vol. 1: Avant Shards* (2010) are described on the cover as transfers from quarter-inch and cassette tape (and aurally sound as if, like *Music Has the Right to Children*, parts of the individual tracks and the master have, at points, been passed through just such analogue equipment). More generally, defunct technology (but also technology that would have seemed cutting edge in the 1970s) is juxtaposed against – and

[61] I do not know whether it seems to me to be more likely that the policy team which named the United Kingdom's National Institute for Care Excellence in 1999 – including then ministers Frank Dobson, Alan Milburn, Margaret Jay, and Tessa Jowell, as well as civil servants Timothy Riley and Felicity Harvey – had read Lewis or had not, when they devised a public body which was to share the National Institute for Coordinated Experiments's acronym.

intersects with – folk horror: Pye was once a near-ubiquitous British producer of consumer electronics, but the cover promises that the reproduction of the tape materials is, somehow, 'psychic'; the cover gives the impression that this is most likely a release of library music, but incorporates an image of what I take to be wild hemlock superimposed upon an unblinking, soulful eye, all tinted in the sickening 1970s horror green of *The Stone Tape* (1972) or *The Changes* (1975). Track titles pursue the same trajectory: 'Lonesome Vale' and 'Folk Festival' rub up against 'Electronic Rhythm Number Three'. The title of the last is also, presumably, another reference to Ron Geesin and the sequence of numbered 'Electro Rhythms' he produced for library music purposes.

The music of The Advisory Circle, Belbury Poly, and after 2012, Pye Corner Audio is released on the Ghost Box label, more or less the house label for hauntology, though it's certainly not the only approach. Plenty of Ghost Box releases operate in very similar territory: it's hard to be sure if the cover of *The Belbury Tales* (2012) is really drawing on a science fiction novel of the 1970s or if it's just that the typeface is the same one that Penguin used for a string of science fiction covers in that decade, illustrated by David Pelham. In fact, Penguin is a touchstone for a great many of the earlier releases on Ghost Box – from Belbury Poly's *Farmer's Angle* (2005) to Mount Vernon Arts Lab's *The Séance at Hobs Lane* (2007) – since their covers all recall unambiguously Penguin's Pelican imprint, which published books written by experts aimed at mainstream audiences, particularly in the format Pelican adopted from roughly the beginning of the 1960s to the mid 1970s. The compilation album, *Ritual and Education* (2008), could perfectly well, in fact, have been the title of just one of those books.

The Ghost Box label name of course derives from so-called ghost boxes themselves, which sit in precisely this same sort of spot since they are not, as might be imagined, Victoriana – although the link between haunting and technology *is*, beginning with William H. Mumler's spirit photography in the 1860s – but, rather, radios which randomly sweep AM and FM frequencies to capture voice phenomena: one might observe that finding disembodied, hard-to-understand voices in the not-quite white noise just to one side or the other of actual radio stations is *exactly* what you'd expect.[62] But it is, too, according to label cofounder Julian Jupp, from 'a phrase that we thought described television itself. It was also based loosely on the title of an old schools' TV programme

[62] Peter Manseau, *The Apparitionists: A Tale of Phantoms, Fraud, Photography, and the Man Who Captured Lincoln's Ghost* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

called *Picture Box* which had a very haunting and memorable title sequence'.[63] That sequence featured a small, rotating glass casket, with a clasp which indicates the lid might be lifted to use it to display some treasure, though it is, in this case, empty. It was accompanied by Jacques Lasry and François Baschet's *Manège* (1965), one of their so-called structures sonores, meaning 'roundabout' to mirror the rotation of the casket, performed hauntingly on the Cristal Baschet, a sort of glass harmonica, but using rods instead of bowls. Sean Reynard – under the moniker Quentin Smirhes – posted a rather brilliant parody of the sequence, which purports to be 'extended footage' of the titles, panning to the side at the close of the more familiar version to reveal that the handle which turns the casket is being cranked by a sinister member of the production crew, who half-smiles, unnervingly, towards the camera.[64] Reynard is responsible, too, for an edit of one of the 1980 *Protect and Survive* public information films, designed to educate the British public about the realities of a nuclear attack: Smirhes appears superimposed over the original footage, apparently playing – on an instrument which looks like a cross between a crumhorn and an ondes martenot – Roger Limb's electronic music for the films. I'm not honestly convinced, given the subject matter, how funny it's capable of being, but it's certainly absurd and the absurdity adds, I think, to how disquieting it is.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it's the disquieting – or downright frightening – public information films of the 1970s that stick in the memories of those who saw them: *Never Go With Strangers* (1971), *Lonely Water* (1973), or *The Finishing Line* (1977), for example, all scan as horror films even if specifically aimed at children. Baron Mordant (otherwise known as Ian Hicks, who worked until 2008 with Gary Mills, who took the moniker Admiral Greyscale), who had already made use of material sampled from the *Protect and Survive* films on the *Dead Air* (2006) album, was approached by the Central Office of Information to provide fresh soundtracks for a number of public information films largely not seen since the times of their initial broadcasts, the information conveyed by them not having remained, presumably, especially current. What is undertaken goes some way beyond re-scoring, however, leading to many re-imaginings of the original films that transform their meanings radically. In *A Double Room in a Single Bed* (2010), for example, images from *Ideal Homes* (1970), presumably showing that year's highly aspirational Ideal Home Show at London's Olympia, are juxtaposed with a voiceover taken from *Tackling Priority Estates*

[63] Jim Peters and Darren Charles, 'Audio Archaeology: An Interview with Jim Jupp', in, Jim Peters, Richard Hing, Grey Malkin and Andy Paciroek (eds.), *Folk Horror Revival: Harvest Hymns 2: Sweet Fruits* (Durham: Wyrd Harvest, 2018), 42–53 (43).

[64] Quentin Smirhes, 'Picturebox extended footage', YouTube, 7 May 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3q0hxKHpA4, last accessed: 8 August 2024.

(1982), which focusses on, precisely, the strategies which local councils were taking, in Tulse Hill, Shoreditch, and Bolton, to avoid being forced to demolish still quite new estates which had, once, been seen as the ideal homes of the future: 'there are at least a quarter of a million dwellings which are neglected, badly run down, and heavily vandalised', the narrator observes, against images of shiny and pristine 'dream homes'.[65] The music here, though, is not of the same order: perhaps the grating drone which is the continuous underscore – punctured by a simple minor seventh–tonic progression – may have been produced via analogue means, but it has none of the warmth and richness that is, often ironically, deployed in hauntological musics. *Ridyll* (2010), a reworking of *Looking at Prehistoric Sites* (1982), contains more familiar manoeuvres, however: a warm analogue synthesiser melody which isn't *quite* what it seems, with occasionally erratic deviations from what appears its 'natural' state, accompanies shots of prehistoric sites, Stonehenge not least. A further dystopian voiceover is borrowed from elsewhere, which suggests that the focus of the film is, in fact, 'housing' and, as the screen cuts to images of ruined Neolithic buildings, 'the problem of how to stop this, and this, and this'. Returning to Stonehenge, the film's visual credits tell you that you have been watching 'An English Heritage film', just as the narrator stresses a different theme: 'Britain: to live there, horrible'.

Chris Sharp's Concretism sets out its stall on the first track of its first release, the title track of the EP *Rabies Warning* (2012) in which just this analogue soundworld accompanies samples from the 1976 public information film, *Rabies Outbreak*: 'Can you imagine being frightened of every friendly animal you meet?', Michael Jayston's narrator asks. 'Normal Service Will Resume Shortly', the third track of the EP suggests, wrongly, the warm tape saturated distortion indicates. The cover shows a radio mast, set into concrete, pointing upwards, optimistically, into almost clear sky, even if perhaps no-one is, in the world of Concretism, there to receive any of the transmissions: the photo was taken at the Brixham Royal Observer Corps monitoring post, made from reinforced concrete and designed for the tracking of potential nuclear weapons activity. A later EP, *Forewarned Is Forearmed*, shows the now-derelict post in more detail, the title again an ironic reminder, here of how completely useless such late knowledge of a nuclear strike would have been, while *Town Planning* (2015) ensures that any optimism that might be taken from title of the third track, 'Prototype Housing Estate', has been deflated in advance by the first, 'The Cursed Streets'. *Town Planning*'s second track, 'Eiswagen' (ice cream van, that

[65] In truth, The Willows in Bolton was not, as might be thought, part of the postwar creation of high-rise streets in the sky but, rather, a product of 1930s slum clearance.

is), performs an extremely neat trick in that it hides in plain view Cold War sampled material: if you're aware of the existence of radio stations designed to transmit coded messages to spies in numeric code, then you'd probably pick out the German voice counting in the middle of the mix as a sample from one of these so-called number stations; what's less obvious, and you'd have to know numbers stations reasonably well to recognise it, is that what seem to be a stereotypical ice cream van's chimes come from exactly the same source, the so-called Swedish Rhapsody numbers station's interval signal.

James Leyland Kirby, recording as V/Vm, first attracted attention with bastardisations of well-known hits, often deploying at least fairly simple pitch-shifting and ring-modulating processes, alongside sometimes fairly serious levels of distortion, to ruin, for instance, on his album *Sick-Love* (2000), John Lennon's 'Imagine' (1971), Chris de Burgh's 'The Lady in Red' (1986), or Robbie Williams's 'Angels' (1997). At the same time, however, he had already begun to record as The Caretaker, under which name he had released *Selected Memories from the Haunted Ballroom* a year earlier. At first glance, this might appear to have as little to do with hauntology – apart from having the word haunted in its title – as the V/Vm releases, since the music sampled here is largely much older: similar sorts of treatments are applied to music from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, by Al Bowlly, Jesse Crawford, the Ray Noble Orchestra, or Lew Stone and his Band, though here often made to sound impossible distant through gigantic reverb, the addition of delay to fragments, and reversing samples, rather than deforming or distorting them. The title gives the clue, however, that the ballroom Kirby has in mind is the Gold Room in the Overlook Hotel, in Kubrick's *The Shining*, during a party which takes place to the accompaniment of Al Bowlly and the Ray Noble Orchestra's 'Midnight, The Stars, and You', in a scene in which the Overlook's caretaker, Jack Torrance, finds himself disorientingly out of time, over fifty years before the film's ostensible present, a disorientation only heightened by the fact that the song dates from 1934, the party taking place in 1921. Kirby also makes use of Béla Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste* (1936), which appears, too, as part of the score for *The Shining*. Many of the other tunes are drawn from the music used in Dennis Potter's *Pennies from Heaven* (1978), a near-contemporary of *The Shining,* which features another fantastical summoning up of the 1930s, as if the characters themselves are dimly aware, as they burst into song, that they are only *portraying* the roles of people in the 1930s while really living forty or more years later. All this is to say that, on my hearing, *Selected Memories from the Haunted Ballroom* is 'set' in or around 1980, but unlike most hauntological musics, its material isn't from an (eternal) present, which *is* the 1970s, but rather focusses on what could still be remembered then,

a sense of memory and history which, implicitly, Kirby seems to argue vanishes after this point, particularly in the first release under his own name, *Sadly, the Future Is No Longer What It Was* (2009), stressed both by the title track, and its neighbour on the second disc of the release, 'Not Even Nostalgia is as Good as it Used to Be'. Of course, it is also the case that, in mind of Baudrillard's comments regarding the repetition of the end of history, what's sampled here recalls the moment before the *first time* history ended, from the perspective of the moments before there became no alternative to its second, farcical end. Al Bowlly himself was killed in 1941 by a parachute mine, in London.[66]

The already huge scale of *Sadly, the Future Is No Longer What It Was* – three discs, totalling nearly four hours of music – is dwarfed by Kirby's final project under The Caretaker moniker, *Everywhere at the End of Time* (2016–2019), a six-and-a-half-hour listen, over six discs. Ostensibly, it is a project concerned with ageing and the onset and progress of dementia, beginning with beauty in seeming excess, the memories (again, the most recognisable sample comes from Bowlly: his 'Heartaches' recurs regularly) almost too rose-tinted, but in a way that makes the distant, now only-for-the-briefest-of-moments-recognisable samples of the second half – the record crackle now wholly denuded of warm nostalgia – increase in potency into the almost flat, bleak final disc: even the coda – a suddenly wholly recognisable performance of 'Lasst mich ihn nur noch einmal küssen' from the St. Luke Passion, formerly attributed to J. S. Bach – manages, if you can listen to the sequence of albums as a whole, to avoid what could easily be saccharine.

To be able to remember, even with the foibles of our own personal histories is, Kirby might at the same time be suggesting, core to what it means to *have* time. The Caretaker, Fisher suggests, shows not only the ways in which hauntology is opposed to the 'nostalgia mode' of Adele, Mark Ronson, Ed Sheeran, or whoever, precisely because of the way in which it points to an 'understanding that the nostalgia mode has to do not with memories but with a memory disorder'. Where the nostalgia mode in the mainstream produces high-sheen, glossy, higher-than-high-fidelity versions of the past, the distortions and oddities of hauntology make 'the dimension of time audible [. . .] [so] that we can hear the time-wound, the chronological fracture, the expression of the sense, crucial to hauntology, that "time is out of joint"'.[67] The musics I mentioned in

[66] Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (London: Faber, 2011), 356.

[67] Mark Fisher, 'No Future 2012 (for Nick Kilroy), in Darren Ambrose (ed.), *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)* (London: Repeater, 2018 [2008]), 638–42 (641).

the previous section are, in a sense, comforting because they are still here; the musics of this section are discomfiting, because they ought not to be.

There is something awry, out of joint, historically speaking, in a world in which the repetitious, the looped, is presented as if it were the new, and hauntology's major contribution is to make that palpable: in a way, there's no escaping the end of the history, time, and the world, no escaping the longest of long 1970s; the only question is whether you *notice* or not. The idea is given probably its strongest visual form in Richard Littler's Scarfolk, which began life as a parody of public information posters (often with the faux helpful note at the bottom of Littler's reworkings: 'for more information, please re-read') and grew in scale to become a comprehensive visualisation of 'a town in North West England that did not progress beyond 1979. Instead, the entire decade of the 1970s loops ad infinitum. Here in Scarfolk, pagan rituals blend seamlessly with science; hauntology is a compulsory subject at school, and everyone must be in bed by 8pm because they are perpetually running a slight fever'.

'Visit Scarfolk today', the advertising recommends, 'our number one priority is keeping rabies at bay'.[68] The similarity between the National Film Board of Canada's eye logo and the omniscient surveilling eye of Scarfolk may or may not be coincidental.

Hauntology is melancholy, above all, but productively, I think. It recognises, in fact, the silent, unconscious melancholy of mainstream music in the nostalgic mode Fisher criticises, and responds with its own, making both tangible. In an unwounded history, Fisher might suggest, the past could be mourned: you might *wish* the past could be recaptured, even with wistful nostalgia, but nonetheless accept that it cannot and that other, new relationships to the world, including artistic ones, must be forged. The nostalgic mode (*as* mode) has its own melancholy, however, refusing the loss of the past and, instead, *incorporating* it so thoroughly, and so apparently unconsciously, that it is *almost* as if the past is still here, even if just a remastered rerun, a reminder of when all this really mattered, as if perhaps it still could, if it were done just right. Like most melancholies, this can only be seen as unhealthy, neurotic, a nervous repetition. The hauntological melancholy is, still, melancholy, but quite differently. Hauntology incorporates the past, summoning it back into the present, but makes persistently clear that, even if you *might* feel nostalgia with respect to this past, these were *not* halcyon days: to desire their return would be pathological. The melancholy is deployed, against itself, as a way to mourn the loss of all the futures that could have been.

[68] Richard Littler, 'Scarfolk Council', 4 February 2013, available online at: https://scarfolk.blogspot.com/, last accessed: 9 August 2024.

3 New Music: Just the High Points

Though new music seems, an awful lot of the time, to have very little to do with either popular music or popular culture – resolutely serious music (*E-Musik*) against music for entertainment (*U-Musik*), in the language of new music's German heartlands – something really rather curious was, at just the same time and in parallel fashion, happening in its ostensibly rarefied world. One reading of the way in which the new music of the 1970s and 1980s proceeded from its forebears in the 1950s and 1960s is to view it as a sort of repetition or amplification of what had already happened. I mean this in at least two senses: one musical and one institutional, although the two are inevitably and ineluctably braided together. I view this repetition, too, as analogous to the way in which, in the Introduction, I discussed the recurrence of the popular musics of the 1960s in those of the 1980s. In new as in popular musics, the return is to a time when the music seemed really to *matter*.

Musically speaking, one of the givens of new music in the 1950s and 1960s – an axiom that would stand just as well for John Cage as it would for Karlheinz Stockhausen, notwithstanding the ways in which they've often been construed as musical antagonists – was that you could treat musical parameters – pitch, rhythm, timbre, say – *independently* of one another, and then recombine the results, producing sometimes unanticipated, thoroughly *new* musical outcomes. Cage defined those parameters as frequency, amplitude, timbre, duration, space, method, and structure, while Stockhausen's parsing of musical sound yielded pitch, duration, dynamic, colour, and place: Stockhausen's five are, if reordered and slightly differently expressed identical to Cage's first five.[69]

I think that a compelling reading of the key trends of that period is that represented by increasingly specialised and amplified investigations of the sort of territory heralded by Cage's and Stockhausen's parametric thought, thinking they shared, to be sure, with a great many peers, including Pierre Boulez, Michel Fano, Luigi Nono, Henri Pousseur, and many others in Europe; in rather differing ways, the same sense that musical sound had constituent elements that could be treated independently informed the music, in the United States, of Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, or Milton Babbitt, the last of whom insisted, too, that the composer must become a 'specialist'.[70]

[69] John Cage to Peter Yates, 6 June 1960, in Martin Iddon (ed.), *John Cage and Peter Yates: Correspondence on Music Criticism and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 133–35 (134–35); Alcedo Coenen, 'Stockhausen's Paradigm: A Survey of His Theories', *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1994), 200–25 (211).

[70] Milton Babbitt, 'The Composer as Specialist', in Stephen Peles et al. (eds.), *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011 [1958]), 48–54.

The music which was central to how new music conceived of itself in the 1970s and 1980s shows a striking inheritance with relationship to this key insight, an insight which is central to any understanding of precisely why postwar new music is so different from its prewar antecedents. The parameter, and parametrisation of sound, had become, by the 1970s and 1980s, an axiom for and of new music, even if it was understood, as Stockhausen had insisted early on, that the idea of simple divisibility was a chimera, an object of human perception rather than physical reality: at a certain level of magnification, the hemiola, the ratio of 3:2 sounds as pitch, at another, as rhythm, a duality which is mirrored in the way in which the word has been used, at different points in history, to indicate both.[71]

Though the parallels I wish to draw are not exact, I think they are close enough to be striking. The most obvious examples of the legacy of parametric thinking appear in Western Europe, where the principal trends of the 1970s and 1980s might be parenthesised as *musique concrète instrumentale*, New Complexity, and spectralism, alongside the *Neue Einfachheit* (or 'new simplicity', even though that, itself, simplifies the German word which gestures more towards *directness* or *unmediatedness* than simplicity as such). These trends point too to particular composers: Helmut Lachenmann, Brian Ferneyhough, Gérard Grisey (and perhaps Tristan Murail), and Wolfgang Rihm.

These musics appear, on my view, to have taken particular parameters as their specialist territory. Lachenmann's music, for instance, in the 1970s in particular, was concerned with the sonic detritus of timbre, which is to say the sounds of instruments which a concentration on pitch made almost invisible: the sound of a bow gripping a string, the clatter of fingernails of ivory, the intake of breath before an attack. His music elevates timbre to a formal-structural device on the level historically taken in new music by pitch. Ferneyhough's music picks up the use of so-called irrational tuplets – by which is indicated here tuplets given in the form of a ratio – from Stockhausen and, again, causes this to become the central conceit of his music, not only nesting such tuplets within one another: yes, a ratio of 7:5 might sit *inside* a ratio of 11:10, but this may well be not the *only thing* a player is being asked to do (or to calculate) and, more, Ferneyhough's music amplifies its fine-grained rhythmic dimensions by inscribing these challenges onto tiny note durations, with many flags and beams, from demi-semi-quavers to hemi-demi-semi-quavers and beyond. Grisey's music – and Murail's too, in different ways – derives from the spectral analysis of real sounds, which reveal not just the fact that individual sounds

[71] Kevin Jones, 'The Cosmic Keyboard: Tuning the Calendar', *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 14, nos. 1–2 (1996), 39–58 (41).

which appear to the ear as indivisible comprise, instead, multiple *other* pitches: what presents aurally as timbre *is* pitch, on such a view, and such spectral analyses allow the fine-grained pitch characteristics of individual instruments, the specific arrangement of partials which gives them their timbre, to become *as pitch* the core material out of which entire pieces can be derived. In short, Lachenmann is concerned with timbre, Ferneyhough with duration, and Grisey and Murail with pitch. Rihm might seem to be a composer of a quite different stripe, in pieces like his Third String Quartet (1976), subtitled 'Im Innersten', or *Musik für drei Streicher* (1977) exhibiting a return to a full-fat late Romanticism, in a language built from sonorities no more 'advanced' than the interwar music of Alban Berg. And yet, in Rihm's own description of what he was doing, the *purpose* of such sonorities was, precisely, to oppose the parametric pursuit of new sonorous building blocks: it was the parameter, as such, that Rihm's music set its face against in its reclamation of hyper-Romantic, hyper-expressive musical gestures.[72]

In the 1980s, these camps became ever more ideologically oppositional, their supporters booing the music of antagonists, while backing and praising the music of fellow travellers to the rafters: 'satisfyingly primitive expressions of clan spirit', Ferneyhough called them, complaining that slanging matches were getting in the way of 'a clear-headed re-examination of the implications inherent in particular stylistic norms' while in the same breath decrying the *Neue Einfachheit*'s 'continual resort to false forms of directness'.[73] That Ferneyhough and Lachenmann recognised Rihm as *their* negative image might be sensed in the fact that it was *they* who were the composer members of the panel which awarded Rihm the Kranichstein Music Prize in 1978, setting the seal on him as a composer of note.

Equally, what the hardcore of seemingly modernist Europeans seemed largely to agree on was that, if Rihm was their sort of bad guy, minimalism was beyond the pale, a judgement revealing of the institutionally repetitive nature of the above: new musical Europe's dismissal of Steve Reich and Philip Glass as all-too-close to the marketplace, all-too-similar to music you might listen to for mere pleasure was a reprise of the judgement in the 1950s of John Cage's music as, somehow, dilettantish, not serious enough, a criticism which feels central to the reception history of new music, even while it is simultaneously true that Cage and Stockhausen (and Cage and Boulez) evidently

[72] Wolfgang Rihm, 'Der Geschockte Komponist', *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*, vol. 17 (1978), 40–51.

[73] Brian Ferneyhough, 'Form-Figure-Style: An Intermediate Assessment', in James Boros and Richard Toop (eds.), *Brian Ferneyhough: Collected Writings* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1995), 21–28 (21).

recognised one another as engaged in parallel complementary activities.[74] This is hardly the only duplication of past events: those composers central to new music's sense of self in the 1970s and 1980s don't simply pick up the idea of the parameter from the 1950s, they index *its* major figures. I have already noted the way in which Ferneyhough's music might be seen to represent on the level of its most obviously significant element, its rhythmic profile, an amplification of the music of Stockhausen. Similarly, the reception of Lachenmann's music cannot be disentangled – and rarely is within writing about Lachenmann – from the importance of his teacher, Nono. Though the spectralists were, in fact, sometimes unconvinced of the central role Boulez played in French musical life, nonetheless they were rapidly associated with the Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique, or Ircam, which Boulez founded in 1977 and directed until 1992, although continuing to wield enormous indirect influence thereafter, even though it was assuredly Murail who took more naturally to the institutional context than Grisey.[75] This is to say that, on the institutional level, Ferneyhough, Lachenmann, and Grisey represent a sort of varied recapitulation of the so-called Darmstadt School central to the historiography of new music in the 1950s. Again, though Rihm might seem like an outlier, he is not: his presence, his Romantic antagonism to formal-structural modernist impulses – and their antipathy to unmediated expression – happened before too, when Boulez, Nono, and Stockhausen stood up and walked out, literally, on the pastels of Hans Werner Henze's *Nachtstücke und Arien* (1957) at the Donaueschinger Musiktage, Henze, too, committed to directness of musical language, even if that meant directly reaching back into the late nineteenth-century canon. The rancour of the 1980s was, on this view, I've said before, 'an institutionally sanctioned re-run of Darmstadt's greatest bust-ups'.[76] Arguably, just this recognisable shape of the institution of new music militated against the success of *other* composers who didn't seem, quite so obviously, to 'belong', including, perhaps not coincidentally, younger composers who had been taught by Mauricio Kagel in Cologne, who himself didn't recognise established oppositional paradigms like that between Europe and America, between Cage and Stockhausen, such as Moya Henderson, whose own music was as happy to draw from Cage as it was from Stockhausen, and much more besides: Henderson's provocative music theatre pieces *Clearing the Air* (1974) and

[74] Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 64–130 & 197–209.

[75] Liam Cagney, *Gérard Grisey and Spectral Music: Composition in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 250.

[76] Martin Iddon, 'Darmstadt and Its Discontents', in Christian Grüny and Brandon Farnsworth (eds.), *New Music and Institutional Critique* (Berlin: J. B. Metzler, 2024), 69–83 (81).

Stubble (1975–76) poked progressive fun at the institutions of new music and their exclusions in a way that was, perhaps, a bit too close to the bone.[77]

On the other side of the Atlantic, arguably two of the parameters which Cage centred, but Stockhausen did not mention, were those which came to the fore: method and structure. They remained centred in Cage's mind, apparently, even once the others came to seem less important: they are the two 'survivors' in the mesostics, Cage wrote on keywords for his music in his 1981 essay 'Composition in Retrospect' and the late Norton Lectures, delivered at Harvard University between 1988 and 1989, including one of his best-known aphorisms, 'My mEmory of whaT Happened is nOt what happeneD'.[78]

Here too it's possible to see a sort of refigured version of the 1950s and 1960s, though not quite in the same way: my reading of the reception history suggests that the most significant composers of new music – a category that it seems to me is sufficiently capacious to take in both the music too-neatly pigeonholed as European avant-gardism and North American experimentalism – in the United States after Cage are Robert Ashley, Alvin Lucier, Pauline Oliveros, and James Tenney, on the side that might be parenthesised as 'experimental', and Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and La Monte Young on the 'minimalist' side, though the porousness of these artificial boundaries becomes evident on any closer examination. For a long time, distinguishing between the experimental and the minimal would have been quite impossible and, it is evident, these boxes are a later historical imposition, if a convenient one. If, as Lachenmann once said of his peers (peers like Ferneyhough, Grisey, and Rihm, that is) 'we are all – more or less consciously – parricidal children of Darmstadt',[79] then these composers are, perhaps less Oedipally, successors of Cage, investigating different and distinct aspects of his heritage: his concern for ideas of musical persona, amplification, and interest in theatre and television points towards Ashley; the idea that the repetition of a simple idea – an idea that is experimental – leads to more, rather than less, interest is foregrounded in Lucier's work; the absolute centrality of listening, even when there is apparently nothing (or, at any rate, no thing) to listen to, is the privileged territory of Oliveros; while Cage's musical impersonality, but also his thoughts on collage, harmony, and rigour inform Tenney's music profoundly. In their radically different ways, much the same might be said of the minimal composers too, in particular ways of configuring ideas of compositional rigour (sometimes even purity of

[77] Ibid, 75–77.

[78] John Cage, 'Composition in Retrospect', in John Cage, *X: Writings '79–'82* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983 [1981]), 123–52 (123).

[79] Helmut Lachenmann, 'Komponieren im Schatten von Darmstadt', in Helmut Lachenmann, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2004 [1987]), 342–50 (342).

process), the importance of musical perception, the impersonal nature of musical material, and the repetition of the boring until the point at which it ceases to be boring. All of these, I think, might reasonably be brought under the twin banners of 'structure' and 'method' and – if there is a real point of distinction to be made between European and North American composers – I think it might be that – from a similar parametric approach to thinking about how sound (and composition) might be parsed – in Europe the parameters of pitch, duration, and timbre became the most important, while in North America structure and method were more privileged.

None of this is to say that the music of these composers, on either side of the Atlantic, is not highly distinctive: it is. Nor is it to posit any absolute division, even though for a long time the sense was that just as they recognised one another, European and North American composers recognised one another as *different*. The sort of idea of absolute antagonism you might hear in Glass's jibe that, in Paris, he encountered a musical culture 'dominated by these maniacs, these creeps, who were trying to make everyone write this crazy creepy music' is undercut by comments like Lucier's that he 'went to all those festivals and heard those wonderful pieces of Luigi Nono and the others, but it dawned on me that that wasn't my thing at all'.[80] Nono, as it happens, turned out to be one of the composers who, in the 1970s and 1980s, became known for an interest in one of the seemingly forgotten parameters, dynamic, as, across the Global North, a wide range of composers began to write much concerned with (sometimes extreme) quietude, occasionally as an increasingly central part of an established output, as was the case with Nono, but which was also true for Cage and even Stockhausen for a time, as well as Tōru Takemitsu, but also Eliane Radigue or Jakob Ullmann. Cage's friend and associate, Morton Feldman, it would be truer to say *continued* to write exceptional quiet music, but increasingly concerned, too, with enormous durations and a different sort of repetition from the minimalists, one where the repeated music gradually drifted in ways which made it impossible to be sure where the point was where it began to change.

Rather, it is to say that, in European new musical circles, the new music of the 1950s and 1960s often connoted by the single marker, 'Darmstadt', was a sort of axiom in the 1970s and 1980s; in the new music of the United States, 'Cage' acts a similar axiomatic point of departure. More significantly, in the current context, all of this is to say that, if in the field of popular music in the 1980s, it's

[80] Philip Glass, 'Landscape with Philip Glass', in Robert Ashley, *Music with Roots in the Aether* (Cologne: Musiktexte, 2000 [1975]), 53–70 (64); Alvin Lucier, 'Conversation with James Tenney', in Alvin Lucier, *Reflections: Interviews, Scores, Writings, 1965–1994* (Cologne: MusikTexte, 1995 [1981]), 207–37 (230).

possible repeatedly to sense transfigured repetitions of a very specific past – that of the 1960s – that echo occurs in new music too, writ a little larger: the 1970s and 1980s recall, very specifically, the new musical world of the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, in both cases, the history seems to be a repetition of when things seemed, in a way, settled, in that this earlier period was when these musics really, on a deep level, seemed like they mattered, and probably mattered to their audiences as profoundly as they ever had done. In both cases, the references are, fairly directly, to some sort of imagined golden age.

If my first claim is that the relationship new music of the 1970s and 1980s had to the 1950s and 1960s is very similar to the one between the popular musics of the 1980s and the 1960s, then my second claim, as might be expected from the matter of the previous sections, is that in the 1990s and 2000s something else happened in the world of new music which parallels, in ways I believe to be revealing, what was going on in popular music, especially after the millennium. I do think that it's interesting – though I am not convinced it is necessarily meaningful – that just as I argued that popular music was ahead of the historical curve in prefiguring the End of History in the 1980s, so new music – a music which has a particular commitment to ideas of futurity as part of its foundational credo – seems to have been moving in similar directions slightly in advance of the same trends in popular music, if, I suspect too, rather less visibly.

One thing that did happen, almost unnoticed, but perhaps unsurprisingly, was that the disagreements and divisions that seemed so important, so central to new music's self-identity in the 1980s, became much less clear-cut. Increasingly, composers didn't seem to feel compelled to pick a lane: where, for Kaija Saariaho, in the early 1980s, the choice she made between Ferneyhough in Freiburg and Ircam in Paris was a stark, sharply drawn one, by the middle of the next decade the idea that a piece might intermingle complex rhythms with spectral harmonies hardly seemed like a desperately outré one.[81] In fact, increasingly, attendees at new music concerts would hear musics which expertly blended complex rhythms with spectral timbres, asked for extended instrumental techniques to be performed *with* hyper-expressive gestures, and made combinations which, only a few years ago, had seemed completely antithetical fuse elegantly, perfectly, such that it was sometimes almost impossible to hear musical distinctions that had recently been so clear-cut. Such combinations even cut across divisions between Europe and North America, a sort of mixing of worlds that seemed to have made music actually suspect in the 1970s, as Henderson found.

[81] Pirkko Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 8–14.

On the one hand, many of these approaches *were* unambiguously brilliant, and made for highly listening, richly engaging musics. I'm going to pick out a few specific examples and comparisons, but I think similar arguments might, with a little change of specifics, be applied to the musics of, with apologies for a list that is simultaneously inadequate and overlong, Michel van der Aa, Peter Ablinger, Ignacio Baca-Lobera, Jaap Blonk, Unsuk Chin, Joël-François Durand, Julio Estrada, Ivan Fedele, Beat Furrer, Clemens Gadenstätter, Georg Friedrich Haas, Volker Heyn, Toshio Hosokawa, Johannes Kalitzke, David Lang, Magnus Lindberg, Philippe Manoury, Wolfgang Mitterer, Misato Mochizuki, Barbara Monk-Feldman, Isabel Mundry, Olga Neuwirth, Younghi Pagh-Paan, Hilda Paredes, Robert HP Platz, Alberto Posadas, Marco Stroppa, Caspar Johannes Walter, or Jörg Widmann.

An extremely clear example might be seen in the music of Mark Andre. In his … *als* … *II* (2001), scored for contrabass clarinet, 'cello, piano, and electronics, for instance, the rhythmic language is 'complex', in the sense that it features, throughout, 'irrational' tuplet ratios, which are drawn from music like that of Ferneyhough, but what is articulated through these ratios is instrumentally 'noisy', in exactly the same sorts of ways that Lachenmann's music is and, indeed, not only is a 'cello tablature used which recalls Lachenmann's string writing in the 'cello solo, *Pression* (1969/2010), or his first string quartet, *Gran Torso* (1971/78), but the gritty, noisy, overpressure attack which is one of the climactic moments of the piece aurally evokes Lachenmann's own earlier solo. The piece is, mind you, aside from that attack, extremely quiet and hushed throughout, in a manner which recalls late Nono. None of those earlier composers would have put this particular set of elements together in this way, to be sure. Equally, however, it is clear that Andre's music, in this piece at any rate, sits at the precise intersection of a set of recognisable existing practices and, more, that the weaving together of those practices is undertaken such that they have a sort of internal consistency.

The music of Rebecca Saunders effects parallel, though different fusions. As early as *Molly's Song 3: Shades of Crimson* (1995–96) or the *Quartet* (1998) – italicised as a piece rather than genre title because it is scored for a nonstandard piano, clarinet, double bass, and accordion – her musical language deploys highly idiomatic approaches to individual instruments, which make possible, for instance, points of timbral fusion between them in ways which, too, evoke the ways in which Lachenmann seeks to create timbral families of instruments, which often operate across conventional orchestrational lines because of similarities of attack profile, say, an approach which also allows for the creation of larger 'meta-instruments', which create singular, fused timbres, impossible on any single instrument, with attacks, sustains, and decays fused together. In

Lachenmann, however, this is a cold fusion: expression as such is refused, often very specifically so, which is, of course, the precise space in which his music *becomes* expressive, but opposes it almost explicitly to the sorts of unmediatedness that might be found in Rihm. In Saunders's music, however, these meta-instruments, largely conceptual in Lachenmann's hands, become, to my ear, almost conventionally, Romantically expressive. This is not to say, of course, that they return to convention in the melodic or harmonic sense but, rather, that they find a sort of hyper-expressionistic gesturality, which seems to draw, initially at least, on the thinking of Rihm, who was her teacher. The sort of fear of expressivity which might sometimes be sensed in Lachenmann is, through the embrace of a Rihm-like sensibility, turned on its head in Saunders, as if modernity might be heard to feel just as deeply, just as unabashedly as Romanticism, even if its feelings must, perforce, be different ones.

Chaya Czernowin's music, too, makes noisy instrumental timbres speak: she has a certain proximity to Saunders in the sense that the dirtier, noisier elements of instrumental timbres take on expressive force in her music, to be sure, but there is an ambivalence in Czernowin that is less readily sensed in Saunders, maybe even a sense, still, that although such sounds *can* speak, perhaps they ought not to, tangible in the almost rough-hewn surfaces of, say, the ensemble piece, *Afatsim* (2006), or the halting beginning of the orchestral *Maim* (2001–07). This sort of thought which draws her, too, towards the sorts of ideas which are the less obvious face of her teacher Ferneyhough's music, where it is concerned with the difficulty of any sort of truthful, authentic speech, in both cases effected through a sort of shattering and recombination of musical materials. If, in Ferneyhough's music, this is often undertaken via an amplification of music at the microscopic level, like Feldman, Czernowin's music is concerned with *scale*. In the terms outlined here, yes, Czernowin, like Saunders, draws together the sort of apparently incompatible Lachenmann-Rihm nexus – though she, I think, does so while remaining unconvinced of its compatibility – but, more notably, draws together and holds the antithesis in tension, between Ferneyhough's micro- and Feldman's macro-scales. Not only that but, in *Maim* and the string quartet *Hidden* (2013–14) alike, she folds the two into one another such that the same timbral gesture can become solid, monolithic, and fragile, febrile, sometimes with the auditory sense that it really is a question of what scale the musical object in being viewed at, whether (too) near or (too) far, perspectives Czernowin's music regularly jump-cuts between, folding the tiny into the immense, and vice versa.

Pierluigi Billone's string trio, *Mani. Giacometti* (2000), and, perhaps even more, the percussion solos, *Mani. De Leonardis* (2004), and *Mani. Mono* (2007)

exhibit yet greater distance between the musical reference points, from a historical point of view. Each reflects, on the level of timbre, the music of Billone's teachers, Lachenmann and Salvatore Sciarrino, in brilliantly inventive ways of seeking the expanded timbral possibilities of the physical resources of the instruments deployed in each. That expansion, in *Mani. Giacometti*, relies above all on the sound – presumably the product of much private experimentation – of the heavily rosined wood of the bow, drawn across an old-fashioned wooden mute, setting the instrument into a resonance which, in the case of the highest of the three instruments, retains a distant sense of 'violin-ness', while nonetheless feeling profoundly alienated from it. The alienation is rather more built in to the two percussion pieces, scored as they are for four car suspension springs and for spring drum, respectively. They appear, though, to undertake something similar: the notation for drawing mallets up and down the suspension springs is even redolent of Lachenmann's for drawing fingernails along undepressed piano keys in *Guero* (1969). And yet, in all three cases, but especially the percussion solos, it is not the timbre which takes centre stage but, instead, the part-meditative, part-minimal repetition of musical materials. These pieces seem to be about timbre, but are, I think, on a more profound level about repetition, if in a ritual sense, which might be to say that they explore what happens when Lachenmann-like materials encounter repetition.

Billone's music finds what might seem a surprising counterpart, or reversal, in the post-minimalism of Michael Gordon, cofounder of the Bang on a Can festival, alongside Julia Wolfe and David Lang, specifically in his *Timber* (2009), composed for six slightly differently cut, amplified 2×4 pieces of wood, each to be played by a single percussionist. On the one hand, the piece is evidently a sort of riff on Reich: the six percussionists recall the six pianists of *Six Pianos* (1973), especially given their hexagonal arrangement in performance, the materials point towards *Music for Pieces of Wood* (1973), and the way in which the piece is organised into waves of pulsation which seem to move around the ensemble evokes the beginning and ending of *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–76). However, minimal repetition very rapidly becomes secondary to a piece which is, just as its punning title suggests it is, an extended exploration of the timbral characteristics of these pieces of wood, different enough from one another that the exact shape, form, and interaction of the spectra that the tight pulsation draws out is unpredictable on the level of the individual piece of wood, the relationship of that piece of wood to the other six, and to the resonant frequencies of the performance space. Slagwerk den Haag, the premiere performers of *Timber*, had the wood blocks already in storage, and introduced Gordon to them when he had not yet decided on an instrumentarium for the piece, because they already required them for Xenakis's *Persephassa*

(1969), also for six percussionists. In short, *Timber* finds, in the resources of minimalism, a way to investigate the parameter of timbre, just as Billone finds, through the parameter of timbre, a way to think about repetition. In performance, both take on, in my view, the character of ritual, a character in which it becomes possible to encounter their unlikely proximity.

Even stronger encounters between what might be thought worlds which had historically been held at arm's length occur, again in parallel fashion, in the musics of Bernhard Lang and Michael Pisaro. Lang's music – or a large tranche of it, at any rate – is concerned, explicitly signalled in the title of a series of pieces, with difference and repetition: *Differenz/Wiederholung* is the series title, a title which also refers explicitly to Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1968), whose insistence that to repeat something *is* to cause it to differ from itself forms the music-philosophical backbone of the whole series. From the start of the sequence, but probably at its most musically striking in *Differenz/Wiederholung 2* (1999), Lang's music is built explicitly out of loops of material which are encased in bars with repeat markings with an indicated number of repeats, of the sort which recall explicitly Reich's scores of the 1970s. Yet what is enclosed *within* those repeat marks is regularly in time signatures which are themselves uneven: fairly regularly, a 3/4 or 4/4 bar is extended by a quaver or a semiquaver; the rhythmic material within those bars, if it is hardly so dense as Ferneyhough, is nonetheless reasonably often articulated in the form of 'irrational' tuplets. Equally, Lang uses the resources of popular music in ways which would feel unproblematic in minimal or post-minimal musics, but, for an Austrian composer like Lang, seem like an illicit fusion of the serious and the light – turntables (in *Differenz/Wiederholung 8* (2003)) and electric guitar, bass, and kit (in *Differenz/Wiederholung 6c* (2006)) – although the consistency of language is so well wrought that, once you reach it, the idea of a turntable cadenza seems wholly unexceptionable. Nonetheless, at a fundamental level, Lang joins together the acceptable (from the European perspective) – a mainstream, 'serious' thinker like Deleuze and complex rhythms – with the unacceptable: literal repetition; the language of the popular.

Pisaro's *Fields Have Ears* (2008), for piano and environmental field recordings, seems like a wholly different piece but, like the relationship between Billone and Gordon, I think Pisaro and Lang are closer than it might seem. Very little, ostensibly, happens in the piece: a pianist plays and sustains very simple material – single pitches, dyads, sometimes repeated – accompanied by, or accompanying, a field recording of an exterior environment, suffused with birds, alongside sine waves, and white and pink noise. It is, aurally, clearly a part of a post-Cageian compositional approach focussed on aural attentiveness to the fine detail of widely separated simple sounds, an impression cemented by

the score which, too, *looks* like it belongs to that tradition. Indeed, Pisaro is quite explicit that, from his perspective (and he suggests that he thinks this is true for many other composers of the Wandelweiser collective with which he is most often associated), his music proceeds from taking it as an axiom that Cage's *4′33″* (1952) functions as a universal truth, above all about what happens in silence: the truth it produces might be summarised as, if you listen musically to an environment in which no music is present, you will hear music, if a music you might not hear anywhere – or anyhow – else. That's to say that *something* is produced by listening to *nothing*, and a composer's role in being faithful to that truth is to find ways to frame silence – or environmental noise – such that it can produce its music. This is to say that, in listening to *Fields Have Ears*, the purpose of the piano part is not necessarily to give you something to listen to but, rather, to *frame* the environmental recording, to make the situation *just* musical enough that whatever music there already is in environmental noise can be heard *as* music. However – and here is where I think Pisaro comes towards Lang – there is a theoretical frame which provides this way of thinking for Pisaro, and it is drawn from Alain Badiou, fairly regularly treated as both Deleuze's successor and one of his major antagonists, philosophically speaking. Specifically, Pisaro draws on Badiou's claim, based on Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, that the *new* proceeds both from an event which is taken, axiomatically, to be a 'truth', which demands fidelity, and that that truth event comes from nowhere, from nothing.[82]

Viewed in general terms, both Pisaro and Lang deploy minimal (if not necessarily minimalist) material, interpreted through the lens of a major contemporary French thinker: it's simply that which one of these elements feels like the interloper is different. In both cases, the musical history would say that these two approaches ought not to meet and, more, ought not to be musically successful, which both unambiguously are. The title of the piece – like *Differenz/Wiederholung* it gives the name to a whole cycle of numbered pieces – is drawn, in fact, not from the sort of world it might seem to be, an American approach to environmental art that might be yoked to Robert Smithson or James Turrell, but rather from a Hieronymous Bosch drawing from *ca.* 1500, *Das Feld hat Augen, der Wald hat Ohren* (the field has eyes; the forest has ears).

These, I'd argue, are the sorts of pieces that represent the high points. Though they could perfectly well have been substituted by pieces by many of the other composers I listed above, nonetheless, they are symptomatic of the more general trends. Of the options available, I confess I have chosen the musics

[82] Michael Pisaro, 'Eleven Theses on the State of New Music' (2004/06), www.wandelweiser.de/_michael-pisaro/11theses-12-06.pdf, last accessed: 13 June 2025.

that are the ones that were (and are) most important to me personally. But most of what was composed in this period was, frankly, nothing like as good as these examples, even though it fundamentally effected the same underlying practice of fusing together previously distinct trends, ones which were central in the previous two decades. I hope I can be excused from pointing fingers at the musics which, to my ear at any rate, fall into this category. By definition, any categorisation of that sort is invidious and, more, I feel confident that other readings of the period would concur with my more general point while picking out different examples of the pieces which nonetheless are really worth spending time listening to, which will reward that time spent: to recall what I said in Section 1, I enjoy listening to Dua Lipa and not to Adele, but I still think both exemplify the sorts of ideas about anonymous, uncentred nostalgia. Moreover, it's perfectly possible now for you to go to listen on YouTube to recordings of so much of just this music, often in recordings from their premiere performances at Ultima, Witten, Musica, Huddersfield, or wherever else, and make your own judgements about what you find most personally rewarding.

Importantly, in any case, what I mean by a lack of success in this case does not follow the usual claims made for any given periodisation of art, that most of what is produced is mediocre at best, and ultimately forgettable, with a relatively small number of pockets of excellence, which are what will survive. On the contrary, my hearing was that a remarkable period of compositional *mastery* was on show: if you were to have attended any of the major new music festivals in the twenty years either side of the millennium, I think you would have heard strings of pieces where outstanding compositional control was on display in fusing these once antithetical approaches, such that it was impossible to hear the joins.

These pieces were, by any standards, brilliantly well made, regularly approaching dizzying standards of technical perfection. And yet, the experience, writ a little larger, was one close to boredom, at least after a while. What was on offer was, to be sure, not some sort of patchwork of quotations, not least because if it had been it would have been possible to say exactly what was being evoked: it would both have been possible, as it were, to 'hear the quotation marks', but also, and more notably, to hear the seams pulling at the join. Even so, and brilliant though the best of this work was and is, taken as a whole body of work, its approaches, even while reconfigured in sometimes brilliant and unlikely ways, were nonetheless recombinations of the *known*. The music was, if you were a new music insider, already familiar, even if you weren't able to pinpoint *exactly* where from. This period of new music, based on ever slicker, glossier, fusions of what was already new music, pinned the pieces to another sort of neverwhen, again recalling some indefinable time between the

1960s and 1980s when, perhaps, it was still possible to imagine that this music was the future: a familiar, high-gloss remix of new music's greatest hits.

Notably, I think, the successful approaches typically operate with greater antitheses: it's almost the case that the further seemingly apart the approaches were – the greater the compositional force required to bring them together – the more potent the outcome. But the underlying point, though, is that, good or bad, there is nothing *new* materially in this musics, even in those pieces about which I have enormously strong positive feelings, personally speaking. It's less a question of whether one piece or composer is better or worse than another – whether Dua Lipa is better than Adele – but rather to identify the temporal circumscription of musical material which they have in common. To be entirely clear: if Adele might stand for popular music in nostalgia mode, then what I am describing here is new music in nostalgia mode.

4 Tall Tales

Remarkably, perhaps a function of just how well-made those pieces really were, pretty much nobody seemed to notice this state of affairs, at least until Michael Rebhahn's 'I hereby resign from New Music', first delivered as a lecture at the Darmstadt New Music Courses in 2012, in which, echoing Joseph Beuys's *I hereby resign from art* (1985), Rebhahn suggested that he had started to have the sense that if new music was concerned with a fetishistic relationship to a particular form of self-referentiality, characterised by exceptionally well-crafted sonic surfaces, then at least some younger composers wanted less and less to do with it.[83] They, too, might reasonably ask of new music: is this it?

The sorts of young composers Rebhahn saw as engaged in actively disentangling themselves from the institutions of new music were creating music which performed a studied unoriginality, which seemed to suggest that these composers thought they might, in fact, have *less than* nothing say. The pieces which seem to exemplify this most strongly to me are different from those Rebhahn focussed on, though they come from the same group of composers. I think, for instance, of Maximilian Marcoll's sequence of *Amproprification* pieces (2016–20), the freshly composed musical material of which is nothing more than an automated layer of amplification, which filters the performance of a piece which already exists (which might include music by Luciano Berio, Ludwig van Beethoven, Gabriel Fauré, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, or Bernhard Lang). Hannes Seidl's *mixtape* (2013) is written for four no-input mixers, the invention of Toshimaru Nakamura, which means that it contains no 'original'

[83] Michael Rebhahn, 'Hiermit trete ich aus der Neuen Musik aus', *Darmstädter Beiträge*, vol. 22 (2014), 89–95.

musical material as such, save the inherent noise of audio equipment, amplified from near-inaudibility into a feedback loop by plugging the mixing desk's output into its input.

Johannes Kreidler's *Product Placements* (2008) compacts 70,200 samples into thirty-three seconds, or claims to at any rate: the piece *appears* to be a critique of the German copyright organisation, the Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte (GEMA), and the system whereby samples can be used, so long as they are officially registered. It seems to me that it's debatable whether the piece is really the thirty-three-second track or the documentation of Kreidler's delivery of his registration documentation to GEMA in Berlin. More, for the purposes of that documentation – it looks to be, at most, a re-staging of events that may or may not actually have happened – it would be just as effective to deliver a vanload of blank paper. There's not even really any *need* to have used quite so many samples (certainly it doesn't *sound* like there are so many) and it's easy to start wondering *where* the piece actually is, if it's there at all. Kreidler performs similar sleight of hand in *Fremdarbeit* (2009), in which an on-stage narrator claims that the composition of the piece was subcontracted by Kreidler to freelancers from China and India, the piece drawing alternately acclaim for its revealing of the iniquities of outsourcing and opprobrium for its apparent complicity with systemic exploitation. Again, there is no reason to imagine that Kreidler actually *did* pay anybody else to complete his commission, and good reason to think that he didn't.[84] The piece, like the others above, is composed *as critique*, the musical correlate of Rebhahn's argument. In that sense, it seems to me that, above all, they point to the problem which these elegantly crafted pieces pose, and even reveal the problem, but without providing any sort of solution to it.

In fact, there is a sort of artlessness which characterises the sonic surface of many of these pieces: they do not *sound* like the perfectly crafted well-made works of the previous decades, which is not to say that they are craftless. On the contrary, in many cases the frayed edges evidently took a lot of work to achieve. In those Marcoll amplification pieces, because the patch which controls the amplification is automated to accompany live performance, there's a friction between them: performance and automation don't always align seamlessly and, actually, more often than not don't. In Seidl's *Mehr als die Hälfte* (2012–13), the musical material is generated via the deployment of an inverted mp3 filter, which is to say that Seidl's filter keeps *in* everything that the lossy compression

[84] Martin Iddon, 'Outsourcing Progress: On Conceptual Music', *Tempo*, vol. 70, no. 275 (2016), 36–49.

of an mp3 filter would normally cut *out*, would subtract as unnecessary for the aural experience of whatever music is being compressed: it's concerned to highlight the literal sonic detritus of the digital reproduction of music. The music of *Fremdarbeit* very often, even though it's being played by live performers, *sounds* like a MIDI realisation, and not a terribly good one. This is one reason why the idea that it really was outsourced is implausible: much of Kreidler's music in this period has this characteristic, which is to say that it sounds just like him, and, more, the effect is, in fact, exceptionally difficult to achieve. The impression of instrumental ineptitude is, perforce, very tightly, skilfully crafted.

Another approach to the presentation of dirtied, frayed edges can be found in Jennifer Walshe's *THIS IS WHY PEOPLE O.D. ON PILLS/AND JUMP FROM THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE* (2004), the performance instructions for which begin: '[l]earn to skateboard, however primitively'. The instructions – formally speaking, it's a text piece – are almost *entirely* concerned with skateboarding, with learning it as a practice and as a culture, with thinking about its physics and geographies, underpinned by a sense that going through this process might put you into a new, changed relationship with your body. I don't think it's at all fanciful, incidentally, to think that the piece is, in this way, a riff on what Cage said Daisetz Suzuki Teitaro described as the difference in your experience of the world before and after studying Zen – 'Just the same, only somewhat as though you had your feet a little off the ground' – though if it's knowing, Walshe gives nothing away.[85] In any case, the players are finally asked to 'skate' an imaginary path they have devised on their instrument, paying particular attention, Walshe insists, to *parametric* considerations (tuning, timbre, dynamic, envelope, and more), which pins the piece, too, to new music, but woven together, so the change of pattern remains perfectly visible, with some strange, other, alien thing.

Since the early 2010s, Walshe has worked with the Aisteach Foundation, documenting the almost entirely forgotten history of avant-garde music in Ireland.[86] The task was made all the more challenging since the vast majority of this music never had very much of a public face in the first place: it was often bound up with the practices of outsider artists, one reason why it had remained marginal within Irish cultural life, where the music of, say, Seán Ó Riada or Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin – which sat at the intersection of Irish traditional music, *sean-nós* singing, and Western art music – played a significantly more

[85] John Cage, 'Julliard Lecture', in John Cage, *A Year from Monday* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1968 [1952]), 95–111 (96).

[86] Aisteach: The Avant-Garde Archive of Ireland, www.aisteach.org/, last accessed: 14 August 2024.

prominent role. Nonetheless, much of this music, drawn from outside the institutional world of new music, bears striking comparison with it.

Walshe uncovered, for instance, the work of the so-called Guinness Dadaists, a nickname acquired simply because several of the members of the group worked at the Guinness brewery in Dublin. They staged what would now be recognised as intermedia performances, intermingling sculpture and (Irish language) sound poetry, as early as the 1920s. Only descriptions of the sculptures survive, though their relationship to ideas of the everyday (both everyday life and everyday materials) is striking, Kevin Leeson, a cooper at the brewery, making use of barrel hoops. Notebooks preserved in Trinity College Dublin make possible at least some reconstruction – Walshe provides some examples at the Aisteach website – of what the sound poetry might have been like. Perhaps inevitably, there is a degree to which it recalls the contemporaneous work of Raoul Hausmann or Kurt Schwitters, save that where *fmsbw* (1918) or *Ursonate* (1922–32) evoke German, Dermot O'Reilly's work was suffused with the pronunciation rules of Irish, which adds – as is common in Celtic languages – initial consonantal mutations, as well as the challenge, for nonnative speakers, of consonants almost all having both 'broad' and 'slender' variants.

The Carmelite nun, Sister Anselme O'Ceallaigh's music, by contrast, wasn't forgotten, as the Guiness Dadaists had been, but had more or less never been heard. Sister Anselme had had, as a result of the restrictions imposed by her order, next-to-no opportunity to perform her long, drone-based organ improvisations. Again, the comparison with existing new music is invidious, not least because there's no realistic way in which Sister Anselme could have known this music, for just the same reason that nobody could have known hers, but, on the basis of an admittedly relatively poor-quality recording of *Virtue IV* (1972), it has the same sort of willingness to sit with near-stasis in quietude that characterises Robert Ashley's *Automatic Writing* (1974–79), say, or much of Eliane Radigue's work, the organ standing in for Radigue's ARP 2500 synthesiser, though the substitution – and the knowledge of O'Ceallaigh's biography – infuses the whole with a very different sense of religious wonder. There's no evidence to shore up such a reading, but I like the idea that the numerator in the title points to the fourth cardinal virtue of diligence, in opposition to the deadly sin of sloth.

There's actually an even earlier version of drone music to be found in the work of Uilleann piper and accordionist Pádraig Mac Giolla Mhuire, fiddler Dáthi Ó Cinnéide, and whistle player Eamon Breathnach. Uilleann pipes, like the bagpipe family they more generally belong to, definitionally produce drones, which accompany faster, more detailed melodic work atop them. In recordings dating from 1952, what the trio does – which *sounds* much more

experimental than it truly is, in terms of practice – is simply to work on slowing the movement of the drones down and to accelerate the melody as much as possible: it's easy enough to see why someone might have thought to exaggerate a contrast which exists ordinarily in the musical practice of the instrument, though there's certainly no precedent for the extreme contrast which develops. In the event, the music sounds somehow like a space between La Monte Young and Eric Dolphy – attractively, since the former once improbably beat out the latter for second alto chair in a college band – while still having an intimate relationship to the Irish traditional music that is simultaneously at its musical heart and being pulled apart in opposite temporal directions.[87] The trio called their music *dordán*, the Irish word for buzz or hum or, by extension, drone.

Outsider artist Caoimhín Breathnach lived practically as a hermit in the village of Knockvicar in Roscommon for the whole of his life. Born in 1934, Breathnach died in 2009, and after his death an archive of what turned out to be an extensive catalogue of work was found. The largest proportion of that work was what Breathnach called 'subliminal tapes', in which he took self-made recordings and then rendered them unplayable – often permanently so – in many inventive ways, from burying or burning them to covering them in materials like velvet or moss. His diaries describe in rich detail his working practices, though he wrote interchangeably (sometimes concurrently) in English and Irish using the early medieval Ogham script. This same sort of sense of either the importance of the ancient or the occult infused the films Breathnach made of sites like the Tobernault Holy Well or the Hellmouth in the Caves of Kesh, both in Sligo. Breathnach was doubtless as surprised as anyone when the Cork Film Festival commissioned him in 1985 to produce a film which was to have been call *An Gléacht* – lucidity or lightness, a rather attractive echo of both the original and the ultimate title of Stockhausen's massive opera cycle: *Hikari* in Japanese, becoming *Licht* in German – and would have been a sort of montage of footage from pornography, occult rituals, the soap opera *Dallas*, and Ireland's iconic *Late Late Show*. The Bishop of Cloyne was so incensed by what he heard of the projected film that he demanded the festival rescind the invitation and they caved under the pressure. Walshe was commissioned, forty years later, by the same festival to complete a reconstruction of, at least, what the film might have been, a labour of love in the end, since she is herself Breatnach's great-niece.

If you didn't already know, I'm sure you've guessed by this stage that this is a sort of hauntology. There never were any Guinness Dadaists. There's no missing prehistory of drone music in Ireland. These musics, and these artists,

[87] Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25.

are all the invention of Walshe herself. Her piece for ensemble and video, *Dordán* (2013), is half documentary about this invented Irish experimental avant-garde and half a piece by, and maybe also about, Walshe herself, a sort of commentary on what it would mean to be a composer at the end of this tradition, even if it is a tradition and a history Walshe has invented for herself. Although you're aware it's a fiction and that you're attending to a piece which is entirely Walshe's, the documentary is compelling on its own terms: it keeps threatening to break out of its fictional frame; you keep (or, at any rate, I keep) *wanting it to be true*.

As an Irish composer of experimental music, Walshe describes this at least in part as an attempt to create for herself a history, a sense of place, and some musical ancestors, whom she never had: 'there's a lot missing' from the history of new music in Ireland, Walshe says, 'not just because it's missing because it existed, but there's a lot missing because it never existed, because there was never space for it to exist, probably outside of people's heads'.[88] It's *hard*, Walshe confesses, to think that the past could have been different from the one that's familiar, *even if* it's clear too that the stories that get retold, the objects that get preserved are treated in that way because they seemed important at the time to the people who made decisions about what seemed important: the values of the past impose themselves on a present which may not share those values, but in doing so foreclose what can be imagined of past and future alike.

The name of Walshe's imagined foundation, Aisteach, surely evokes for one audience the name of the Irish arts association, Aosdána. But I suspect at the same time it toys with the long-standing inability of the Anglosphere to come to terms with the pronunciation of Irish, whether in Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980) or stand-up comedian Joe Lycett's insistence that he was able convincingly to troll a security guard at the Royal Bank of Scotland into issuing a guest pass to him in the name of Rhubarb Bikini, having baldly asserted that the forename is Irish and pronounced Ryan (activities which, if Lycett is to be believed, caused his friend Peter, an employee of the bank, to face disciplinary action). The way in which, for I imagine the majority of non-Irish readers, the Aisteach website – indeed the name of the foundation itself – will present repeated challenges of pronunciation is perhaps a further play on the ways in which so much of what seems normative in the sphere of new music – its institutional norms and self-referentiality – are near-illegible to those from outside it. Aisteach means, in fact, quite simply 'peculiar' or 'strange', as

[88] Rob Casey, '*Aisteach*: Jennifer Walshe, Heritage, and the Invention of the Irish Avant-Garde', *Transposition: Musique Et Sciences Sociales*, vol. 8 (2019), available online at: https://journals.openedition.org/transposition/3110, last accessed: 14 August 2024.

well as 'wonderful' or 'surprising', which might be idealised watchwords for new music, at its best, at any rate, in the stories which new music tells itself.

Yet, as is clear, for all that I think that new music *is* peculiar, strange, wonderful, and surprising, it is also self-enclosed, hermetic, and concerned with its own histories, histories which are very far from inclusive, producing music which, though profoundly concerned with ideas of progress, is often only *progressive* by accident. 'If you're only ever told in school that your predecessors are these, in my case, all of these dead men', Walshe says, 'there is not a lot of space to imagine that you have any position in that narrative you know. Whereas if you can imagine a whole pile of different people, you know, there is more space for you to say, "maybe I can be part of that"'.[89] I don't think the echoes of new music as it *did* happen are coincidental: what would the history of new music look like if *Licht* had been written by an outsider artist from Roscommon and not Stockhausen? Why shouldn't it have been? And what would it sound like if it had? The Aisteach website, confessing its own fiction in a disclaimer, puts forward an invitation to readers: 'If you feel there's something we missed, something you want to have happened and would like to bring into being, please let us know.'

If new music, as it was understood for the majority of the second half of the twentieth century, by century's end found itself largely trapped in a nexus of self-referentiality, producing ever better versions of the same thing, then envisaging a history of new music which *didn't* happen but perhaps could have done and maybe even should have done also makes it possible to imagine the utopias of those musics, futures which are still imaginable, which may even still have new music in them. If new music has ever had the dialectical relationship to society that Adorno once insisted it did – if it has been a space to imagine new social futures, new interpersonal relationalities, without being pinned to the restrictions of the actual – that an exhausted world may still have some use for it. Of course, Walshe's response to the problem isn't the only imaginable one – it's not even the only element of her output, though it's the seam I've found the richest and most rewarding – but it is instructive, without being paradigmatic. It enables – or could enable – composers who feel like the history of new music, or of Western music in general, has no real place for them, no roots they can connect to, no people who look like them in it, to *invent their own* histories – ones which are, again, perhaps a bit like a past which could have happened but didn't, a reminder that the present, too, could have been different, and imagining different presents is one step towards believing in the possibility of different futures. The importance of hauntology for new music is, above all, that it insists

[89] Ibid.

that the past could have been different, that what's remembered, or what has been remembered, isn't all that happened, and reflects only what seemed – probably quite recently – important to people who might well have priorities very different from yours. More, it remains possible still to *choose* which elements of the past would have led to a better present, which of the things that happened are the ones which seem most important to you, here and now, and, if necessary, if they don't exist, if they're missing from the record, to *invent* them, in the service of imagining what a better future would look like, a future which is, whatever happens, *different from* the present. Walshe asks 'why not imagine a different history?' And place yourself at the end of it. Or the beginning.

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